

PICTOGRAPHY EMBEDDED IN TRADITIONAL AFRICAN DECORATED
WALLS AND FLOORS AS AN EARLY CULTURAL LANGUAGE:
THE CASE OF THREE LANGUAGES IN LIMPOPO PROVINCE

By

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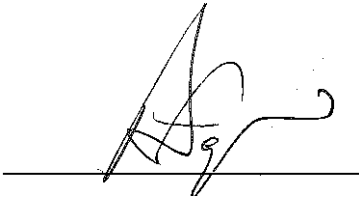
DECLARATION

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I declare that the above dissertation is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'A. D. N.', written over a horizontal line.

SIGNATURE

06/01/2019

DATE

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I would like to thank my family Elna, Siburo, Libo, my two granddaughters Zila and Khensi for their patience and understanding of me not being with them all the time, during my research. I would also like to extend my sincere gratitude to my friend Mr Shadrack Shiburi who accompanied me in my field research. My sincere gratitude to Dr Nkuna PH who assisted, supported and guided me through this research.

I also hope that this research will add valuable information and knowledge to our dying African cultures, oral tradition and beliefs.

ABSTRACT

The colonial era brought about Western civilisation, industrialisation, urbanisation and technology that led to the negation of the validity of the traditional wall decorations and the meaning behind what is understood as merely decorative shapes and patterns. To research as to whether this is true, the aim of this study is to establish whether the symbols applied on the traditional African murals have any linguistic significance. The research investigated the pictography embedded in the traditional murals of three linguistic groups, namely the Balobedu, Vatsonga and Vhavenda in Limpopo Province.

The researcher gathered and recorded from the surviving elders the vital codes which unlock the meaning of signs, symbols, colours and geometric shapes before the knowledge is lost forever when they die. Data was collected mainly from Vatsonga female elders in their homes by using unstructured interviews. Traditional huts are decorated with symbols, signs, shapes, lines, and colours on the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard), *mavala ya nghotsa* (design and patterns, mainly in repeated half circles (figures 26 to 35)), *mabilomu/swiluva/ swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers), *ku sindza hi makholo* (patterned cow dung floor) and *ku tsema* (coloured bands around the hut), depicted in figures 12 to 15. According to the respondents, the *maphapha* (calabashes/gourds) is a symbol for the plant that feeds the people. The plant from which *maphapha* are made, has heart-shaped green leaves and yellow flowers that develop into a calabash/gourd, which are consumed as food (figures 10–11). In this sense, it represents a woman and her responsibilities as carer and life giver.

The results affirm that the pictography is not merely a reproduction of common decorative patterns, but is instead the source of an ancient visual expressive language carried down from generation to generation through oratory and visual narratives in the form of symbols, and signs. The study recommends the preservation of the linguistic significance of the traditional South African murals that have long been marginalised, possibly encouraging the younger generations to review their own history.

Key words: pictography, Vatsonga, traditional walls, *maguva*, walls around the courtyard, decorative patterns, visual language, *ku sindza*, *ku tsema*, murals

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

This research investigates the idea that the pictography embedded in the traditional South African murals is not merely a reproduction of common decorative patterns. Instead, it is the source of an ancient language that communicates traditional beliefs, which have been embedded in the African collective consciousness and carried down through oratory and visual narratives in the form of symbols, patterns, shapes and signs that carry spiritual, magical and celestial messages. It attempts to prove that these depictions are not singularly for decorative purposes, but are rather an ancient, though primitive form, of communicative writing (pictography).

This chapter focuses on the northern areas of Limpopo Province where there are still murals painted by the three linguistic societies in this geographical area. In the north are the Vhavenda, in the northeast are the Vatsonga, and in the southeast are the Balobedu. These communities are known to have integrated through similar religious beliefs, intermarriage, and traditional, cultural, and linguistic influences (Siyabona Africa, 2017). Furthermore, these groups appear to have assimilated their practices of the ancient art of home decorating with pictography using colourful clay to draw geometric shapes, patterns and other markings.

The findings of this research contribute towards the preservation of the language embedded in the pictorial mural adornments that serve as a record of the history of this fast disappearing South African tradition. The following paragraphs elaborate on the requirements of this research study.

1.2 Definition of concepts

The concepts and terms used in this chapter are based on the definitions provided below. The definition of concepts is an attempt to explain the meaning of the terminologies.

1.2.1 Pictography

The general purpose of this chapter is to clarify the term "pictography" or "pictorial writing" used specifically in expressive visual language. Mutwa (1964:66) states that "symbols are engraved or painted on the cave for people to see memories of important events". In the same way, pictograms or pictographs refer to the engraved or painted symbols, such as images or patterns, found on the walls of the homes of the groups or communities under investigation.

1.2.2 Early cultural language

According to Guenther (2003:103), "rock art was embedded in the San's own expressive, cosmological and ritual culture". In the same way, in this chapter the phrase "early cultural language" is used to show how the role of language is embedded in the symbols used to decorate and adorn everyday objects and dwelling places.

1.2.3 Symbols

Morrell (2011:27) argues that "the sign would be the image or denotation, and the symbol would be the deeper meaning that is attached to the sign". In this chapter, the term "symbol" is used to indicate the meaning attached to signs, images and patterns used in the expressive visual language embedded in the oral and traditional beliefs of the three linguistic groups in Limpopo Province.

1.2.4 Symbolic language

According to Helsinger (1982:203), "Ruskin's interest in the use of symbolic languages in art develops together with his conviction that all visual perception must be active and imaginative. When he calls art a language ... of painted line and colour, signifying the visual aspect of things while expressing mental process."

For the sake of this research, the term "symbolic language" means the use of patterns, shapes, signs and images that have an underlying meaning.

1.2.5 Oral tradition and traditional beliefs

As stated by Lee (1931), the terms "oral tradition" and "traditional beliefs" are used to explain a tradition which was gathered chiefly from ancient time, i.e. knowledge was handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. Oral tradition and traditional beliefs may even be viewed as a form of genre as well as being a traditional means of communication. In this research study, the terms "oral tradition" and "traditional beliefs" are used according to Lee's description, i.e. when oral narration of certain traditional beliefs are told or written, there are secretive words, signs and symbols used to communicate certain meanings. It therefore becomes a brand of language understood only by certain people in the audience.

1.2.6 Mural painting

The term "mural" in this context means a social activity shared by women through interaction and paint motifs or themes on the walls that represent and symbolise their beliefs, events or favourite objects (Courtney-Clarke, 1990). In this way, the decorated motifs communicate messages to the community. This can be regarded as an expressive visual language through signs, symbols, and shapes of expressive patterns of pictography embedded in the oral traditions and traditional beliefs.

1.2.7 Limpopo Province

Mokwana (2009:149) mentions that the name "Limpopo Province" was used as early as the 18th century. Different ethnic groups live in the province; amongst these are the three linguistic groups under investigation, namely the Balobedu, Vatsonga and Vhavenda. For the purpose of this research, the mentioned groups are believed to be still practicing this form of wall decoration, which can be perceived as a means of communication through pictography with iconography (signs, symbols and images) that make an expressive visual language.

1.3 Background to the study

The background to this study includes information that contributes to the formulation of the research question. The main points covered include the ancient civilisations that made use of pictorial writing, namely Egypt and Mesopotamia. San art and artefacts found in the area studied, such as Mapungubwe,

include the traditional practices and mural decoration that use symbols that could be interpreted as a language form.

Previous studies have shown that African cultures had written language and mathematical records, e.g. the cuneiform writing and the mathematical inscriptions on the Ishango and Lebombo bones. In countries such as Egypt, France, Syria, North America and Africa, there seem to be numerous findings of ancient writings, such as hieroglyphics, cuneiform as well as a wide variety of cave paintings that depict symbolic imagery.

In the Egyptian pyramids, visual expression is used to depict oral history, religious beliefs and funeral processions in the form of narrative images (hieroglyphics). In France, the Palaeolithic drawings in the Cave of Lascaux depict disembowelled bison in an early form of prehistoric hunting scene. The *wampum* (small cylindrical beads made from shells) created by the North American Indians relay hidden messages, such as peace between three linguistic groups, in their design. About 27 000 years ago the San people in South Africa made rock paintings in caves in the Drakensberg and Cederberg areas; their advanced skill evidenced the repetition of visual messages. Findings excavated in the Blombos Cave site on the southern Cape shore indicate hatching and cross-hatching of lines with geometric motifs that express human thought in the form of a language.

Sub-Saharan African indigenous knowledge evolved through various systems that seem to the researcher to reveal African philosophical and social thinking. However, previous studies concluded, "the patterns on wall decorations were influenced by the traditional dress, pottery, woodcarving and beadwork of Bapedi people" (Vogel, 1983:2).

In this way, the oral traditional beliefs played a significant role in the society; their influence was sometimes revealed both in their functional or non-functional everyday objects. Many ancient artefacts showed similar symbols and images throughout many African groups, e.g. the sceptre, bowl, and rhino mini sculpture made of gold leaf discovered in Mapungubwe, were associated with symbols of the royal kingdom, and clothing adorned with beads of different colours held meaning for all the groups. Seemingly, it was common practice in African society for a wooden meat plate to be associated with authority and status and even to be buried with a man of good standing in the community.

When looking at the traditional African wall decorations, it appears as though the iconography together with the utilisation of symbolism in the form of colour, shapes and patterns, seem to bear evidence of narratives, which are also present in African oral tradition. On the face of it, these are believed to depict historical events, mythology, legends, beliefs, culture, religion, praise songs and children's stories. The oral traditions and traditional beliefs of the three linguistic groups were seemingly captured visually as stylised motifs, organic, and geometric anthropomorphic plants and reliefs of mythical animals on the mud walls in the form of wall decorations. It could be that the artists producing these wall decorations may have done so consciously, though many could have been done using folklore and motifs that formed part of the collective consciousness of the community, e.g. some of the imagery include totem animals, animals and colours believed to have magical or spiritual significance.

In their historical photographic research of these homesteads, Matthews and Changuion (1989) show a significant number of wall decorations, however there appears to be a significant decline in the use of these possibly because:

- the three linguistic groups no longer erect traditional homes, but instead utilise municipal homes, which are not decorated in the same way.
- of the impact of migrant labourers throughout South Africa as people move from their rural homes to find work in the cities or larger towns.
- of the westernisation of South Africa, in particular because of the impact of various forms of technology, such as the internet and television, among others.
- many of the traditional storytellers and leaders who used to continue the traditions of storytelling and handed down the traditional ways have been removed from communities because of factors such as apartheid killings, forced removals, other political reasons, old age, as well as HIV and Aids.
- it was believed that oral traditions and traditional beliefs were a form of educating the community and the youth, but because of the impact of technology and modern education, this form of instruction has largely become obsolete.

Through this endeavour, it is possible to preserve this aspect of traditional life by:

- recording oral traditions and beliefs, visual language and lifestyle data obtained via interviews; and

- publishing the findings and possibly entering the new data into archives that would be available for heritage preservation within this geographic area.

In theorising that the pictography with shapes, patterns, and symbols (iconography) used in the traditional South African murals are a form of communication, the planned research study refers to ancient symbolic forms of communicative writing found in Egypt, France, Syria, North America and Africa where there are numerous findings of ancient writings such as hieroglyphics, cuneiform writing and wampum. It also draws from a wide variety of cave paintings done by the San people of southern Africa, which depict symbolic imagery.

This investigation ascertains the possibility of the visual depictions and images being informed by the oral history of these regions. Similarly, the wall decorations of the three linguistic groups in Limpopo Province narrate their oral and traditional beliefs through the depiction of signs, shapes and symbols that are expressed in intrinsic decorative patterns with communicative meanings.

Kaschula (2001: xv) suggests that

these stories are historical accounts composed of local events, which were passed down by family tradition, such as war, famine, drought, etc. In most cases, these narratives are more exact as regard to time and places mentioned in the story. In most instances, these narratives are supplemented further by means of fantasy.

In some cases, these narratives deal loosely with the history of past rulers, military leaders or folk heroes of the particular society. Sometimes, there could be a belief that the whole community had once been saved from a disaster by a long-dead member of the tribe. This would form the basis for an historical narrative or oral and traditional belief.

1.4 Research problem

The threat of extinction of what is presumed to be wall decorations and their meanings as an expressive visual language, especially the meanings behind the pictography with iconography that was influenced by the oral traditional and traditional beliefs of the three linguistic groups under investigation, namely the Balobedu, Vatsonga and Vhavenda in Limpopo Province.

1.4.1 Statement of the problem

Traditional South African murals have been an integral part of social interaction of some local cultures. However, unlike the mural painting of the Ndebele, which is thriving, the murals of the Balobedu, Vatsonga and Vhavenda found in the northern part of Limpopo Province are fast disappearing. Nevertheless, factors influencing the oral tradition and traditional beliefs and wall decoration, such as everyday objects and body adornments, are fast disappearing, and this contributes to the dying of this ancient expressive way of communication among the people in their settlements. Various factors, such as the urbanisation and westernisation of communities, contribute to this. Most of the homes that bear the history of this ancient language with pictography depicting the oral and traditional beliefs no longer exist or are already dilapidated.

It is also important to note that oral tradition and traditional beliefs are generally assumed unrecorded because the African people were illiterate; oral traditions and traditional beliefs were recorded in written form only recently. However, over the ages, people found ways to record their stories, e.g. the San people recorded stories of hunting and celebrations in the form of painted images that can be read centuries later. In the same way, it is believed that the decorative walls of the three linguistic groups of the northern region of Limpopo carry the ancient stories of these groups through secret symbols embedded in the patterns, lines and forms on their domestic murals.

In addition, pictography with the signs, symbols, basic design shapes, colours, patterns and imagery on these walls, have been mistaken as mere decorative patterns and thus the significance of this language form has been negated. Therefore, there is a dire need to capture the history and investigate the original purpose of these pictograms and consequently correct the misperception of previous studies, i.e. that these murals are merely decorative and do not bear any symbolic purpose. This research attempts to prove that the signs have linguistic significance.

1.4.2 Research questions

The researcher focuses his investigation on the following key questions:

- What are the possibilities that the wall decorations of the three linguistic groups under investigation, namely the: Balobedu, Vatsonga and Vhavenda, were not merely random symbols,

but rather comprise an intricate replication of age old symbols which were depicted on the walls of mud huts and carried down by word of mouth for generations over many centuries?

- How do the visual signs and symbols (in the form of lines, shapes and forms) on the wall decorations of the three linguistic groups under investigation, represent the spiritual and magical imagery consistent with the language of expression that is present in the oral and traditional narratives of the mentioned linguistic groups?
- How can pictography be extracted according to the most suitable depictions common to all three linguistic groups, as related to the oral narratives associated with subjects, such as the myths and legends, which had specific traditional meanings associated with the human lifecycle, i.e. birth, puberty, marriage, childbearing, and death, of the three linguistic groups?
- How can the contributions by other linguistic groups also be explored in order to support the study?

1.5 Aim and objectives of the study

The aim and objectives of the study are used as a guide to establish whether the symbols on the traditional African murals have linguistic significance based on the oral tradition embedded in them. The origins and common characteristics are traced as follows:

1.5.1 Aim

The study aims to ascertain and record how the symbols in the African traditional murals were used to capture its intrinsic meaning as an ancient pictorial language.

1.5.2 Objectives

The outcomes for this investigation, which potentially lead to the conclusion of this study, are based on the provided objectives to:

- establish that traditional wall decorations as applied at some traditional dwellings are not merely decorative but represent a language that informs through symbols, which have an embedded meaning.
- link the origins of the various African cultural representations of similar symbols, showing the connectivity of the linguistic symbols used in this ancient language to the three mentioned societies in Limpopo.

1.6 Rationale of the study

The particular history of the area investigated had contributed to various factors that threatened the survival of this particular language form. Thus, this study had been considered important for the following reasons:

- The colonial era brought Western civilisation, industrialisation, urbanisation and technology that led to the negation of the validity of the traditional wall decorations and the meaning behind what is understood as merely patterns and shapes for decorative purposes.
- To save this dying cultural practice of traditional South African murals, there is a need to record and document the surviving information and wall decorations that may carry ancient messages that could be decoded and interpreted. Since many of the female elders in the villages, who traditionally are responsible for creating these mural decorations, are dying out, it is imperative to gather the vital codes which would unlock the symbols before the knowledge is lost for all time. By undertaking this research, it may still be possible to get the translations of the signs, symbols, colours and geometric shapes from the surviving elders.
- By doing this research, it could be possible to record the historical significance of the traditional South African murals that have long been marginalised, possibly encouraging the younger generations to review their own history.

The wall decorations of the three linguistic groups in Limpopo Province were not comprised solely of unsystematic symbols, but were rather well thought through replications of symbols used over the ages on the walls of traditional homes, everyday objects, ornamentations and body decorations and carried down orally over many centuries.

This research has faithfully recorded aspects of the wall decorations with symbols, signs, and shapes in visual narrative form, which were marginalised up until now and may be in danger of dying out. By taking from and evaluating the different sources available, it may be possible to take pictures or video recordings and interpret the symbolism on the murals of traditional homes of the various three linguistic groups in the north of Limpopo Province. Thus, a record of the oral traditions and traditional beliefs could be obtained in an objective and informed manner, unaffected by political interpretation and popular legends.

Essentially, the findings had established what appeared to be mere decorative patterns, whereas they were in fact the remains of an ancient language used to depict symbols associated with oral tradition and traditional beliefs within the various groups. The researcher had used archived materials, photographs and interviews with traditional leaders, elders and mural practitioners to establish the connection among the three linguistic groups due to inter-cultural merging. The findings may be used to establish a community programme to reintroduce the traditional practice of mural decorating in which the traditional symbols are explained and linked to the ancient symbolic language.

1.7 Scope of the study

It is widely believed that South Africa is rich in traditional African wall decorations, but for the purpose of this research, the focus is on the three linguistic groups in Limpopo Province that are believed to be predominantly rural and possibly still practising various traditional beliefs. These three linguistic communities are known as the Balobedu in the Modjadji area, Vatsonga in the area of Malamulele, Giyani and Elim, and the Vhavenda in the area of Elim, Thohoyandou and Makhado. These three linguistic groups are closely connected and have a significant overlap in social beliefs and cultural practice, as well as a significant merging of cultures through marriage and other communal factors. Therefore, references made about Vatsonga (especially in Chapters 5, 6 and 7) will be assumed to include Balobedu and Vhavenda unless particular distinctions are drawn. Similarly, although the title refers specifically to decorations on walls and floors as the main focus of the study, the discussion will not be exclusive of decorations on clay pots (for example, fig 38 & 39), facial decorations (for example, fig 27) and tattoos (for example, fig 26), where appropriate because decorations as a means of communication have no limitation and could not be restricted to how, when and where one writes his/her thoughts and feelings (cf Chapter 4 and 5). They used storytelling in the form of educative and formative moral lessons whereby the storyteller, who may also be a wall painter, would visualise a narrative on the wall by shaping and modelling it to express the theme/core of the oral and traditional belief through pictography directed at the audience. The storyteller might blend the original story with details taken from contemporary life for the audience to better enjoy and understand the moral of the story (Finnegan, 1970:328).

Although oral and traditional beliefs are a central part of this research, the focal point is predominantly on the use of stylised symbols to incorporate the oral traditions depicted on the walls of traditional homes as a means of communication (expressive language). Murals, which are bedecked with traditional patterns, stylised shapes of animal and human figures, and organic and geometric shapes are still practiced by some of the older women in the villages.

1.8 Plan of the study

The study is arranged according to the following sequence:

Chapter 1 is the introduction where the research is placed within a context, the problems of the research are stated, and the parameters of the research are defined.

Chapter 2 presents the historical facts of the arrival and early history of the Balobedu, Vatsonga and Vhavenda as well as their migration and cultural influences on one another. The Afrikaners who settled in Schoemansdal (later named Louis Trichardt) clashed with the Vhavenda people who first settled in the area.

Chapter 3 gives a general background to the oral and traditional beliefs, and symbolism on the wall decorations of the Balobedu in the Modjadji area, Vatsonga in the area of Malamulele, Giyani and Elim, and the Vhavenda in the area of Elim, Thohoyandou and Louis Trichardt. Here the wall decorations and facts relating to oral and traditional beliefs (as they are known) are discussed in relation to their traditional customs, ancestral worship and practices.

Chapter 4 deals specifically with the key oral tradition and traditional beliefs, the role they play and factors that directly impact on the wall decorations and their meanings, especially the meanings behind the various shapes, symbols and signs. Here an attempt is made to determine the actual events that gave rise to the symbols, geometric shapes, and signs. Furthermore, this chapter looks at the four most possible interpretations given the historical information that is still available today.

Chapter 5 is a summary of the analysed data collected from the Vatsonga respondents. The analysis is on the symbolic and expressive visual language depicted as decorative patterns of shapes, lines, and

colours on the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard) *mavala ya nghotsa* (designs and patterns), *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers) *ku sindza hi makholo* (patterned cow dung floor) and *ku tsema* (coloured bands around the hut) as depicted on the traditional huts.

Chapter 6 provides the findings gathered during the fieldwork, which were taken to research as to whether the Vatsonga traditional murals use ancient visual symbols, shapes, colours, lines, and patterns that when arranged in a certain way, become an expressive language that communicates a message.

Chapter 7 provides the general conclusion and recommendations on what improvements can be made and on the gaps towards new information on the findings in this research topic. It was assumed in the hypothesis that the pictograph of patterns, shapes, symbols, and signs painted on the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard) of the traditional huts of the Vatsonga is an expressive visual language that communicated meanings.

1.9 Ethical considerations

The ethical considerations define the ethics on the relationship between the researcher and those who are affected by the research, interpretation, and reviewing of the research data or findings in the following way:

1.9.1 Planning

The researcher interacted with the keepers of tradition and knowledge from the three linguistic groups, i.e. the *sangomas* (traditional healers), storytellers, traditional mural painters and other relevant sources.

1.9.2 Conduct

To avoid any misunderstanding, the researcher consulted with the authorities and chiefs for permission to pursue the research. Presumably, the chiefs asked the *ndhuna* (local headman) or other trusted aid/s to assist in sourcing the relevant practitioners.

1.9.3 Reviewing research findings

To confine the research, not all the people who were affected and reviewed are acknowledged. However, where pictures were taken of the community, the people with whom the researcher interacted are acknowledged with their permission.

The findings have been recorded honestly without bias and favour. As privacy and secrecy may be required concerning the traditional beliefs, symbols and signs in the pictography, the researcher has adhered to any mutual agreements between the people within the community and himself.

1.10 Summary

The study investigates pictography embedded in the traditional South African murals that are mistakenly understood to be simply wall decorations. As in other African communities on the same topic, researchers concluded that wall decorations were meaningless and just decorative patterns of geometric shapes. In this research the possibility that African wall decorations were not solely comprised of unsystematic symbols, but are rather a well thought through replication of symbols used over the ages on the walls of the traditional homes is investigated. Furthermore, everyday objects, ornamentations and body decorations that had been carried down visually as a medium for capturing oral tradition and traditional beliefs over many centuries were depicted on the walls. However, this traditional practice is disappearing very fast because of modernisation, westernisation and elders dying with traditional knowledge and wisdom.

To protect, save and preserve this dying ancient language research must be conducted. The research plan and the scope for this investigation was to visit the villages of the three linguistic groups in Limpopo province, the Balobedu, Vatsonga and Vhavenda to collect the information. Elders who remember the oral traditions and the interpretation of symbols, signs, colours, patterns, shape were interviewed. Wall decorations of the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard), *ku sindza hi makholo* (patterned cow dung floor), *ku tsema* (coloured bands around the hut) and *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers) also known as *swiapulana* (small apples) were photographed as evidence of the existence of this ancient language.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction: Origin and migration of the three linguistic groups and the white people in Limpopo Province

This chapter seeks to establish the African people's origin and their migration from central Africa to Limpopo Province. It also explores the early history of the Balobedu, Vatsonga, and Vhavenda, and the arrival of the Afrikaners from the Western Cape.

The Afrikaners, under the leadership of Louis Tregardt and Jan van Rensburg, were the first to move to the northeast Transvaal in 1835. They were later joined by Hendrik Potgieter and settled in Schoemansdal, which was later named Louis Trichardt.

According to Hull (1981), Bantu migration is estimated to have started about 1000 BCE. During the 1300s, Europeans sailed around the southern tip of Africa on their way to India, and in 1492, Pope Alexander gave the world's unknown lands to Spain and Portugal. Grant (2009) mentions that this led to Portuguese explorers, such as Bartholomew Diaz, to explore such places as the Cape of Good Hope and the Indian Ocean. The Portuguese explorers were the first to sail around the Cape of Good Hope in search of a trade route to India round Africa. After the discovery of the sea route to India, countries like England, France and Holland competed for control of the spice trade routes. However, on their mission to establish colonies and trade, they decided to settle in Africa. After the defeat of the French by the English in the eighteenth century, the English and the Dutch were the only trading companies that made use of the Cape of Good Hope for commercial purposes and as a stopping off place on the sea route to India.

According to Sparks (2003:5) and Hammond-Tooke (1937:23), the Bantu were migrating from Central Africa and moving in smaller groups that dispersed into different directions, mostly southwards. Hence, some groups moved down to the south on the west coast through Angola around 500 BCE. At the same time, some groups progressed to the Great Central African rainforest eventually settling in the south in what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, and Zambia. Other small groups settled in the centre near the Great Lakes of East Africa. In the meantime, other populations near the

coast and the rivers started to move on to where a rich environment supported their way of life, which was dependent on small farming and pasture. Migrations by small groups to the southeast from the Great Lakes region were settlements widely dispersed near the coast and near rivers.

According to Nabudere (2011:4) cited Cheickh Anta Diop (1989), humanity originated in the Cradle of Humankind about 50 km northwest of Johannesburg in South Africa. Furthermore, Egypt was colonised by the Ethiopians who brought civilization to Egypt.

At this stage, the Ethiopians were not the only people in Africa, there were Pygmies in Central Africa and the Khoi-San in southern Africa who might have been in contact with other people in Africa. Links are evident in Egyptian hieroglyphics and African mythologies, e.g. the creation myth, the idea of gods and how they were venerated, ancestral beliefs, ideographs for sign language, and the use of animals with super powers. The Pygmies and the Khoi-San were the earliest people to use this wisdom and knowledge through dramatization and dance by the Shaman in the trance state.

According to the Egyptologist, Gerald Massey (1907) as cited by Nabudere (2011:5), "Egypt is the light of the world". Thus, this African knowledge and wisdom informed the teachings of the Greek philosophers such as Plato and Socrates, who were Egyptian scholars. This wisdom and knowledge spread to the Greeks, Europeans and Aryans. Nabudere (2011) further explains how the migration of Africans gave them names like Africans, Bantu and blacks. The fact that there are many concepts about the names is because of the migration routes they used to get to the other parts of Africa. The Bantu are the people in sub-Sahara from central and eastern Africa where they migrated using different routes to the north east and down to the southern tip of Africa. Some believe that some of the Bantu are a mixture of different African races. Thus, because of the black African and Bantu migration, the knowledge, wisdom and secret rituals were carried from place to place and were eventually integrated into the resultant mixture of races Nabudere (2011).

African people from the west, central and east as well as those of the Semitic, Kimet, and Hematic groups, were somehow mixed. It can, therefore be implied that the black African knowledge systems and wisdom were adopted into these cultural systems.

According to Language (2009: 311),

The physical characteristics of these groups vary considerably as they do also among the Bantu themselves; thus, skin color varies from light to dark brown, but in most cases is chocolate brown, in contrast to the West African Negroes, whose skin colour is generally black.

It seems that when the Bantu of Africa were migrating, they moved from place to place, as hunters, gatherers, pastoralists and subsistence farmers. While they were on their migration path, they presumably encountered resistance from other tribes and were forced to fight. Some were captured as prisoners of war, others were kept as slaves, and yet others intermarried. To the north and in the Sahara Desert, most people are brown, presumably because they are mixed with people speaking Semitic languages. South of the Sahara, on the eastern coast, some Africans mixed with the Arabs causing their skin colour to be light to dark brown. On the west coast, people have a dark to black skin tone. Those who migrated to the southern tip of Africa mixed with the indigenous people known as the San and the Khoi-Khoi causing some to have a yellowish skin tone. Europeans and Arabs encroached on Africa through trade, including slavery, and made contact with the local African people. The result led to the introduction of these groups into the African tribes. This could explain the physical characteristics and differences in skin pigmentation.

Tobias (1937) conducted a study on the genetic composition and demographic of the Bantu-speaking people of South Africa to establish the Bantu origin phenomenon and the differences between other African people. However, he found that his approach did not help, as it affected the concentration of the genetic flow between the populations and it was not easy to explain the study and meanings of some of the complications. For example, one criterion used to define them was different from the others because they have different languages, chiefdoms, cultures, economic systems, political boundaries, geographical boundaries, social structures, etc. He further indicated that this phenomenon was even more complicated for people who studied languages, physical anthropologists, social anthropologists and demographers.

However, Shaw's (1937) argument helped establish how Africans differ from one another while sharing the same ancestry, culture, oral tradition and traditional beliefs. She mentioned that for one to understand how to identify the South African Bantu-speaking people one must know their "traditional

material culture" and their "ecological region". As mentioned before, answers to the above discussion are embedded in their knowledge systems, rituals, taboos, secrets, wisdom structures, communication systems and structures. Thus oral history, traditional beliefs and cultures, form the basis of their expressive language and representations, as it is depicted in their use of iconography portraying celestial and cosmic symbols illustrating ancient representational shapes in the form of design patterns evident in their homes, ornaments and adornments. Seemingly, this practice was used for many years. It has remained the same and some people in Limpopo Province may still use it today as their way of life, heritage, genealogy and experiences during the migration are rendered in the form of pictographs that informed their culture and beliefs.

Language's (2009) argument is reinforced by Ralushai (1977:22) when he discusses the origin of the Vhavenda as it is narrated in their oral history, traditional beliefs and culture:

Venda oral tradition and works of both European and Venda writers are full of accounts on pre-European settlers Venda migration, and their arguments are presented here in accordance with the supposed places of origin, namely Egypt, the lower Congo, the Great lakes area, Vhukalanga, finally the Northern Transvaal.

He indicates that their origin has different theories that become unclear as to which area in Africa the Vhavenda originated from before they crossed Limpopo River and established their historic settlement as we know it today. It must also be realised that strictly speaking, it is quite difficult to ascertain with any real degree of accuracy, precise details pertaining to the main three linguistic groups in Limpopo Province relating to their times of moving around looking for places to settle before the advent of European influence and modern documentation. Certainly, the only written records we have from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were from European sources with obvious bias.

It is noted that by CE 300, some of the early migrating groups had reached modern KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa along the coast and others, the modern Limpopo Province (formerly Northern Transvaal) by at least CE 500. According to Mamiane (1999:5), "in around the 15 centuries some of the stronger and well organized Bantu groups established powerful chiefdoms".

By the middle of the fifteenth century, large migrations of Karanga had moved to the Northern edge of the plateau and spread east and west to cover what is now Korekore country. (The name "Korekore"

was applied to these people later.) One group travelled under their legendary leader, Mutota, the ruler who held the dynastic title Mutapa.

Seemingly, the progression of state-formation increased from the 16th century onward. In the ancient Great Zimbabwe, the well-known complex of Monomotapa was built presumably due to the denser inhabitancy that led to more specialised divisions of labour, including military power. The economic activities during the migration era amongst the African communities including the three linguistic groups under investigation, namely the Balobedu, Vatsonga and Vhavenda, the Chinese, Arab traders on the coast, and Europeans, increased and led to the political scramble which led to the rise of new nations in the 18th and 19th centuries.

2.2 Settling of the three linguistic groups in Limpopo Province

Here, the historical facts (as they are known today) are briefly discussed regarding the migration and the settling of the three linguistic communities currently known as the Vhavenda, Balobedu, and Vatsonga in Limpopo Province. The colonization of Africa by Europeans and Arabs was for slave and economic trade. Hammond-Tooke (1937) explains that from around 800 AD, the Kingdom of Mapungubwe emerged between 1030 and 1290 AD, later followed by the establishment of the Great Zimbabwe Kingdom. As other Bantu people migrated, the Vhangona (Vhavenda people) are also believed to have originated from the Great Lakes of Central Africa and moved down to the south of Africa. They are supposed to be among the many groups that originally came from the Congo and East Rift who crossed Limpopo River.

Cartwright (1974) acknowledges that around the 17th century, the Balobedu people in south-eastern Zimbabwe were led by Dzugudini (their king's daughter) who escaped punishment by death after her brother made her pregnant.

Van Warmelo (1935) mentions that the people who completed the migration of the Bantu were the Vatsonga who moved from Mozambique to Schoemansdal. They followed João Albasini, their self-proclaimed paramount chief to Schoemansdal, later called Louis Trichardt. Their migration ended approximately in the early 1900s.

2.2.1 Vhavenda

It is noted that by 1220 AD, Mapungubwe was the capital state with a district stretching 200 km up to Great Zimbabwe. Their first capital state, named Dzata, was built on the Soutpansberg Mountain close to the Mozambique and Zimbabwe borders. The area where the Shashe and Limpopo rivers meet, and where South Africa, Botswana, and Zimbabwe meet, became the trading point for the people and the Arab-Islamic traders living along the African east coast.

Sparks (2003:10) reveals that,

In the far north was the small Venda tribe, goldsmith and stone-builders, who are thought to be related to the Karanga of Great Zimbabwe and the legendary kingdom of Monomotapa, whose supposed gold wealth fascinated white explorers for centuries.

The trading post traded many products including gold, copper, iron, sheep, goats and cattle. These accessories were produced and shipped to and from the shores of the ancient Ethiopian ports of Adulis to the Red Sea and the ports of Mozambique and Zafara (Sofala) in the east African coast. The collapse of the Great Zimbabwe Kingdom due to a struggle for succession, led to the breakaway of two members of the royal family and their followers; one group moved northward while the other group went south.

This first group of the Vhatavhatsindi and the Makwinda moved to the Soutpansberg area, which had already been inhabited by the Vhangona in around 1720. The second group, the Singo, moved across the Limpopo River around 1700 and settled in the Nzhelele River valley where they moved into an existing village, enlarged it, and named it Dzata. This became the capital of all the different clans living in the area. They were united for the first time under a single ruler. This state of affairs lasted for about sixty years, until the death of the legendary leader Thoho-ya-Ndou (Head of the Elephant).

Currently the Vhavenda live around the Soutpansberg mountain range, which stretches in an east- west direction for about 150 km. In the eastern half, the mountain range breaks into three fertile valleys and rivers that flow into Limpopo River. Similarly, the same people, under the leadership of Shiriyadenga the first king of Vhavenda in Mapungubwe, are found predominantly in the Vhembe region in the Soutpansberg. They are the descendants of the clans from the historical area of Mapungubwe. The

Vhangona and Vhambedzi are acknowledged as the original inhabitants of Vendaland. They were later joined by the Karanga-Rodzvi clans from Zimbabwe, i.e. the Vhatwanamba, Vhanyai, Vhatavhatsindi, and Vhalembethu. Masingo, Vhalaudzi, and Vhalemba.

The Semitic Arabs, who moved from the area of Israel and Palestine into Africa, were later known as the Vhalemba people who settled in Vendaland. They are the descendants of Semitic Arabs and the lost tribe of the Israelites known as the black Jews. As was previously mentioned by Ralushai (1977), not much attention is given to their migration history. Only a synopsis of their origin and final settlement is recorded.

Nettleton (1984a) brings to light that the documented archaeological evidence tells us more about the history of the people under investigation, namely the Vhavenda, Balobedu, and Vatsonga. This argument is based on the archaeological findings of the excavated items in the Zimbabwe ruins and Mapungubwe. These objects included glass beads, the golden rhino and utensils decorated with chevron and zigzag designs. These findings further assist to decode and document oral tradition and traditional beliefs, culture, signs, symbols and designs of geometric shapes through what is understood to be decorative patterns by some people, and what is believed to make up a visual communicative ancient language.

In addition, myths and stories about the mysterious rivers and lakes with secrets and taboos such as that of Lake Fundudzi, Mashovela and other places with mysterious connections, give us an insight into how people communicated their wisdom and knowledge in the past. Southern Africa is rich in diverse evidence found in other African countries and influences from Arabic and European countries as well. As it has already been said, the fact that the origin of the Vhavenda people and the migration route they travelled, as told in their oral history, was from Central Congo, where they believe to have originated and then travelled to Egypt and even later south to South Africa is not documented; it is narrated only in their oral history. However, the findings in the excavated objects that have similar symbolic, sign language, decorative designs and patterns of natural representation could serve as possible evidence of the missing links about their origin and the route they travelled during their migration. All these ancient design patterns, signs, and symbols of stylized animal representation

recurred on the walls of the homes of the Balobedu, Vatsonga and Vhavenda who constitute the three linguistic groups under investigation.

All these people lived together in South Africa until the Vhavenda people opted for independence from the apartheid government. Stoffberg (1988:44) mentions that "Chief Patrick Ramaano Mphephu, the great-grandson of Thoho-ya-Ndou, is the President of the Republic of Venda". The Vhavenda people, under the leadership of Chief Patrick Mphephu, received independence from the South African government in September 1979 and the residents lost their South African citizenship. Vendloland was divided into 32 chieftaincies. For the easy control and smooth running of the politics in the Vhavenda territory, the disputed different status levels, chieftaincies and paramount chief (*khosikulu*), and senior and lesser chiefs were put in place and recognized in preparation for Venda Independence. In 1994 they were reconnected to South Africa when all the homelands and independent states, created by the apartheid government, became part of the democratically elected government of South Africa.

2.2.2 Balobedu

West and Morris (1976) mention that the Balobedu came into existence in the 17th century when the son of chief Monomotapa broke from his father's kingdom and established his own. His daughter, Dzugudini, was seduced and impregnated by her brother. Dzugudini and the baby boy accompanied by her mother fled the royal kraal.

West and Morris (ibid) concur with Cartwright (1974) in their book, *Realm of the Rain Queen of the beloved*. The book is a compilation of oral traditions collected in 1930 by J D and E J Krige regarding the origin and migration of the people under the leadership of Dzugudini, who occupied and settled in Bolobedu (*ho loba*) in Sehlakong, the head kraal in the Molototsi area.

The Royal kraal of Modjadji, the Rain Queen of the Balobedu, is a unique society full of mysticism, rituals, incest and strife. The Queen is known for marrying wives and thus extending her influence because they linked her politically to other families or villages. In around 1600, Dzugudini gave birth to a baby boy and he was named Makalipe. It is believed that he would be the first of six male rulers of the Balobedu over the next two centuries. During the fifth century, Queen Keale of the Balobedu was a polygamist who married young women, not for lesbianism but as a traditional practice. After

her son's inappropriate sexual attraction to her young wives, she ruled that her succession would not automatically go to the eldest son as it was supposed to but would be decided by the ancestors. A chosen person would be allowed to open the hut specifically built for choosing a successor whether male or female. In the meantime, she taught her son, Mokoto, the secrets of rainmaking. When his sons later threatened to kill each other for the throne, he secretly trained his daughter Modjadji in the rainmaking rituals. After he died in 1800, Modjadji opened the hut and she was the chosen one. Modjadji was the forerunner of the matrilineal royal family.

Hilton-Barber (2011) points out that Queen Modjadji did not depend on any army for protection from her enemies, but on the strategic location of her kingdom in the lowveld between Levubu and the Olifants River, and the respect her enemies had for her magic. If she was attacked, the consequence to her attackers was drought and famine. She was also known for her rainmaking powers received from her mother during her mother's escape from her father to their current settlement. Rainmaking was used for various reasons such as for agriculture and taboos. Various rain making objects, such as beads and pots with holy water and an animal horn containing medicine that included the body dirt and skin of deceased queens, were kept in a secret place near the Queen's hut. If the whole community did not follow the taboos, then they would experience disasters such as drought and hail that would destroy a young crop.

Van der Wiel (2012:73) asserts:

In 2003 the sixth Balobedu Queen, the daughter of Makheala who died in 2001, was Makobo, (and youngest) the last Rain Queen. Two years later after taking short ill, she died at the age of 27.

The Death of Makobo (the last Rain Queen) in 2003 suggests the end of the 200-year Rain Queen dynasty, as it is alleged that her child, Princess Masalanabo, is not recognized because her father was a commoner, which is against the traditional laws of heritage.

Hammond-Tooke (1937) describes the Balobedu settlement as being surrounded by the Vatsonga to the south, the Balobedu and Vhavenda to the north, and several other tribes to the west. Their language is Khelobedu. The Balobedu/Balotswi are more related to the Rozwi/Kalanga who share the same

praise line "people of Thobela". Their historical rainmaking powers and linguistic group also connect Queen Modjadji to the Kalanga, Lemba, Nubi, Mambya, Shankwe, and Tshivenda as a language of the Rozvi.

Motshekga (2010:131) explains how the Balobedu are related to the above-mentioned groups as follows:

The Balobedu Kingdom came into being early in the seventeenth century, when the Karanga empire broke up into the Vukaranga Kingdom in the north and the Vurozwi Kingdom in the south.

The Bapedi also arrived in the 1700s and settled along the Steelpoort River. The Bapedi speak a language similar to Khelobedu that is spoken by the Balobedu. The Northern Sotho (Bapedi) speak (Sepedi), which is built around Khelobedu, and they are regarded as having similar descendants. The Northern Sotho are known as the Bapedi, under the leadership of Sekhukhune.

2.2.3 Vatsonga

It is believed that the Vatsonga moved from Mozambique to first settle in Elim and later in the Gazankulu homeland in Limpopo Province. Van Warmelo (1935:92) indicates that the scattered Xitsonga language with its many different dialects in the areas covering parts of Swaziland, the current Mpumalanga, the Kruger National Park and south eastern Zimbabwe, is an indication that the Vatsonga covered a large area of the country. The Vatsonga, who spoke in a dialect historically known as Xihlanganu, which is a Tsonga dialect, are found in Swaziland, Mpumalanga, the Kruger National Park and between the Sabie and Nkomati rivers in Mozambique. The Vahlengwe are also known as the Vatsonga and their dialect, Xihlengwe, is mainly found in the upper Limpopo River and Save River areas in Mozambique and south eastern Zimbabwe. Though they spoke different dialects, the language and cultural practices were largely the same.

During 1821, a Zulu clan under the leadership of Soshangane, fled the wrath of Shaka and settled in Gaza presently known as Mozambique (West & Morris, 1976). In around 1816, Shaka the warrior rose to power and expanded the Nguni into a Zulu Empire. Thereafter, began the *Mfecane* (in Sesotho,

known as *Difaqane* or *Lifaqane*), a period of widespread tribal wars, dominance, chaos and disturbance in southern Africa.

After almost two decades, the last group of the Vatsonga who moved from Mozambique and settled in Riyodze near the present day Louis Trichardt, were under the leadership of the Portuguese hunter João Albasini, whom the local people called Juwawa. Cartwright (1974:20) affirms that "João Albasini, native commissioner of the eastern district, chieftain of the Knob-nose kaffirs, as the Machangana were nicknamed by the Boers", established his own empire in Spelonken, also known as Xipilongo, and proclaimed himself chief of the Magwamba (Vatsonga) in the community. Hilton Barber (2011:19) add that "On his death in 1889, General Joubert was not in favour of Toni Albasini, the son João Albasini to take over the position".

In the *Bantu speaking tribes of South Africa*, Van Warmelo (1935:117) comments on the Vhavenda division and how they are related to the Balobedu and the Vatsonga in the Zoutpansberg Mountain area from Louis Trichardt eastwards to the south:

This Venda population to the South of the Zoutpansberg was partly driven out and partly absorbed by the influx of the vaTonga, who drove a wedge in between the Venda of the Zoutpansberg and the Sotho of the present districts of Groot Spelonken and Duiwelskloof. But a number of the Venda remained, though the waves of Tonga immigration surged all around them. Thus, we find today that Venda chiefs like Mashau, Masia, Magoro and others, are surrounded by a Tonga population.

In the surrounding areas also live the Vatsonga, who are related to the Magwamba in Hlanganani, and those in the Giyani, Louis Trichardt and Malamulele districts; the Mavundza and Valoyi in the eastern Giyani districts and Tzaneen area; the Vankuna in the Tzaneen district; the Hoxani and Nhlanganu groups who live in the Barberton and Bushbuckridge districts; the Xika in Komatipoort; and the Maluleke (under hosi Xikundu) whose land was confiscated by the Afrikaners. In about 1835, the Vankuna came from Ngome in KwaZulu Natal. The Valoyi, who were believed to have come from the Varozwi in the south of Zimbabwe, and the Mavundza and Rikhotso settled in Limpopo Province (previously Transvaal) South Africa. The Maluleke (Van'wanati), who refused to be dominated by the Gaza of Soshangana and the Ndebele of Mzilikazi, also settled in the northern part of the Kruger Park.

2.2.4 First Afrikaners who settled in Limpopo Province

The Afrikaners in the Transvaal were unhappy with the then British secretary, 4th Earl of Carnarvon's plans to form a confederation. In 1878, they sent Paul Kruger and EJP Jorisen to Carnarvon in England to discuss their situation in South Africa. Their dissatisfaction led to the first Boer War (16 December to 23 March 1881). Louis Tredgardt and Jan van Rensburg moved to the north east Transvaal in 1835. They were later joined by Hendrik Potgieter, who left the Cape Colony in 1836 and settled on a farm near Zoutpansbergdorp (Zoutpansberg, later changed to Schoemansdorp). Louis Tredgardt's party eventually left on the Delagoa Bay route to Sofala (near Beira).

Cartwright (1974:20) mentions that the "first colonists to settle near the Soutpansberg mountains were Coenraad de Buys and João Albasini". Coenraad de Buys was a leader of the so-called half cast clan known as the Buysvolk (Buys people). João Albasini was born in Portugal in about 1813; he moved to Lourenco Marques (Mozambique, Maputo) with his father who was a sea captain. After surviving being attacked and kidnapped by chief Soshangana, he became very close with the Tsonga people who recognized his leadership skills. Chief Magashula gave João Albasini land in the current Kruger National Park near Pretoriuskop, where the ruins of his house can still be found. Because of the danger of malaria in the area, he moved to Lydenburg where he married Gertina van Rensburg, the daughter of the trekker Janse Van Rensburg. He settled in Schoemansdal, where he proclaimed himself paramount chief of the Vatsonga in Valdezia, Bungeni and Hlanganani. The Vatsonga army, heavily armed with assault rifles, guarded his fort. At that time, chief Njhakanjhaka was the chief of all the Tsonga people who moved from the Isimangaliso wetland in Maputo to the Kruger National Park during the third century to seek refuge in the north and east of the then Transvaal (now Limpopo Province).

In 1855, Schoemansdal became a trading post between the residents and the Vhavenda, who were hunters and ivory traders at that time (Davenport, 1991:146). Periodic crises occurred in Schoemansdal such as cattle theft and attacks by the Vhavenda leader Makhado after the Afrikaners and João Albasini interfered in his succession dispute after his father's (King Ramabulana) death in 1864. The Vhavenda recommended Makhado as the rightful successor after his father as he had already been initiated into this position. He was supported by Makhadzi Nyakhuhu and Khosi Munene Madzhie against his

brother, Davhana, who received assistance from the Afrikaners and João Albasini, the self-proclaimed paramount chief of the Vatsonga.

Makhado's army attacked and burned Schoemansdal to ashes forcing the Afrikaners to start a new settlement in Pietersburg (now Polokwane). Stefanus Schoeman, President MW Pretorius, and General Paul Kruger tried to bring peace between Makhado and Davhana to no avail. The Ngoni and the Swazi joined João Albasini to fight Makhado, but they failed to defeat him. While Makhado and the Boers were still at least verbally in conflict, German and Swiss missionaries arrived in 1872 and 1875 and Makhado permitted them to establish mission stations. Later, they became involved in the continuing conflict as mediators. Makhado died in 1895 from suspected poisoning.

João Albasini and Coenraad de Buys were the only white people who stayed behind when the others moved away from Schoemandal to Pietersburg. However, in around 1870, the Afrikaners returned to Schoemansdal. João Albasini welcomed them and gave them land and food. In 1875, the Afrikaners also welcomed the Swiss missionaries who established additional mission stations, the Valdezia primary school clinic, and later Elim hospital. The missionaries spread their missions from the Njhakanjhaka village to the eastern and northern Transvaal, the Waterval Township, Shiluvane and Masana, i.e. everywhere that the Tsonga speaking people were settled. Zoutpansberg (later known as Soutpansberg) operated as a semi-independent community until 1864. They were then included into the South African Republic after helping Paul Kruger and Marthinus Pretorius to invade the Orange Free State under the command of Stephanus Schoeman. In October 1898, General Piet Joubert reclaimed the territory after defeating the Vhavenda leader, Chief Ramabulana Khosi Mphephu, who fled from the Afrikaners in 1898 but returned in 1901. The town was proclaimed, and named after Louis Trichardt.

2.3 Effects of the urban migration of the three linguistic groups in Limpopo Province

After the discovery of gold in Johannesburg (1881), and diamonds in Hopetown (1867) and Kimberly (1871), both blacks and whites flocked to Johannesburg to work in the mines (Warwick, 1983:125).

In Limpopo Province, the black Africans had for many years been working in mineral mines such as gold, copper and iron, which was found in abundance at Mussina and Leydenburg. The result was that new towns, such as Pietersburg and Leydsdorp, came into being.

The movement of both black and white South Africans was because of historical and political differences, urban migration and its consequences, and different cultures and belief systems. The upheavals, which initiated the mass movement of people in the nineteenth century, had a great influence on the oral tradition and traditional beliefs, and wall decorations as an expressive language with visual depictions. Inter-marriage between the different groups allowed people to share their skills and establish a hybrid form of representation in which different traditions were combined and used as a form of inter-tribal communication. It would appear that the evidence of common trends and influences, where traceable, are particularly evident in the wall decorations of most groups. The three linguistic groups use the same pictography of some shapes, symbols, patterns and colours with the same meanings.

The migration of black South Africans in search of work, away from their homelands and independent states, contributed to cultural exchange, and tribal and traditional influences among the people. Similarly, it can be argued that the oral tradition and traditional beliefs on the decorated walls of black South Africans had been impacted. The consequences of urbanization, the apartheid regime, and forced removal contributed to people doing away with their traditional heritage and culture; they adopted a Western lifestyle by building and living in houses similar to those of the Europeans. Furthermore, the people in their respective villages negated certain rituals, oral traditions and traditional beliefs, such as storytelling and decorating their homes in preparation for the festive seasons. They willingly relented their wall decorations, possibly embedded with messages carried through oral tradition and traditional beliefs. Thus, very few have survived. It is unknown whether this practice is still given the recognition that it had 30 or more years ago but it appears to have slowly died.

2.4 Influence of *maguva* (walls around the courtyard) as a visual expressive language of the three linguistic groups in Limpopo Province

To summarize, this investigation is also very reliant on what connotations the people under investigation ascribe to certain oral and traditional beliefs in the representation of patterns, shapes,

signs, symbols and colours. According to *kokwani* (grandmother) Makaringe a respondent in Mbhokota village told that, although they may once have had a traditional meaning in the past, today it may be acknowledged that they have lost their meaning in most cases. The more modern interpretations would seem to have relevance for the people today.

In this context, these interpretations have greater relevance when attempting to translate the pictography with signs; symbols; patterns; designs of geometric shapes; stylized linear shapes and forms of nature, animals and cosmos imagery; and the iconography that exists in oral tradition and traditional beliefs with visual meaning (as it exists today), which may be understood by the community members. The interpretations are quite likely to include many Western influences and nuances (albeit Africanized).

While previous studies were conducted on South African traditional murals, the findings have always concluded that the imagery of pictography on the decorated walls in Limpopo Province were purely for decorative purposes and served no deeper meaning. This is evident in the research done by Vogel (1983) in which she studied the wall art of the Bapedi of Sekhukhuneland.

In this chapter, a phenomenological approach will be followed. The researcher was inspired by Littlejohn (1992:216), who said that the phenomenological approach "dealt with the factors concerning how, why, and what people communicate". In this regard, a phenomenologist looks at the lived experiences to observe what is there, i.e. if one wants to know what love is, one would not ask the poets or psychologists, one would tap into the consciousness of love in one's life and in the lives of others. Phenomenology comprises three basic principles:

- Knowledge is conscious; it is not secondary from experience, but is rather an expression of conscious experience in itself.
- Meanings are ascribed to a phenomenon based on the potential of those objects or an individual's actions, i.e. how a person relates to an object determines the meaning.
- Through language, meanings can arise through which we experience the world. As a result, labels can perhaps be attached to an object.

This chapter investigates how black South Africans experience their world of communication through pictography embedded in oral tradition and traditional beliefs, e.g. their art of traditional wall decorations and how they perceive it.

Abrahams (1983:20) states that, "traditional or oral culture refers to the sharing of an expressive body of knowledge and values." Such traditional pieces of knowledge are passed on primarily by observation, common experience and explicit word of mouth transmission. Furthermore, researchers in the Northern Province, North West, Mpumalanga, Eastern Cape and the Orange Free State examined and documented studies conducted on the subject of South African wall art. Similarly, Vogel (1983) did a study for her master's degree in which she researched the wall art of the Bapedi of Sekhukhuneland in the Northern Province. Her main aim was to document and analyse this art form that occurred between 1929 until 1979. Her research aimed at establishing whether specific styles existed and what influenced their style, i.e. how the two and the three-dimensional art forms impacted on the lives of the Bapedi.

Vogel (1983:2) mentions that,

Most of the literature in South African murals appeared to be in the context of analysing the decorated patterns and motifs on the walls, utensils and body ornaments.

The findings of various scholars were similar. They are all convinced that traditional wall art in South Africa was influenced by the traditional dresses, pottery, woodcarving and beadwork of black people.

Matthews and Changuion (1989) recorded and preserved this art form photographically in their book that has 150 colour photographs of well-painted figurative art on the mud walls of the huts of black South Africans. This art form has gone through a rapid change and is fast disappearing in other regions. Matthews and Changuion (ibid) recorded the monochromatic as well as the colourful Ndebele homes, the surface-relief decorations of the Southern Sotho, and the pure expression of wall art of the AmaXhosa and the Vhavenda people.

Many attempts have been made to document the Ndebele history, political background and religious beliefs. Schneider (1986) did an intensive research on the two Ndebele groups known as the northern (Ndzundza) and southern (Manala) Ndebele groups. The Ndzundza is the largest group (about 90%) and the Manala is the smallest group (about 10%). According to Schneider (op. cit.), the Ndzundza group were a group of painters whilst both groups were specialists in beadwork.

Schneider (1986:5) adds that "the North Sotho people have had much influence on the Ndebele people; in addition, their dialects both had Nguni language base". Schneider (1986) explains that Weis (1963) did some research on their beadwork and wall decorations but lacked a theoretical framework. According to Schneider, Weis' research concentrated on issues such as the social-cultural life of the North Sothos and the historical background relating to their colonial encounters and the political impetus.

In an attempt to understand the possibilities of and influences on wall decorations, various researchers concluded that these African wall decorations were used purely for decorative purposes. Their findings were silent on the symbolic language embedded in wall decorations, the meanings of signs and symbols which may be attached to various African traditions, and that these may constitute a language. It is assumed that no authorities have yet searched, recorded or analysed the significance of the pictography, which sometimes contains iconography, in the South African wall decorations.

According to Nettleton (1984a), no authorities have ever investigated, recorded or analysed the trend of the iconography in traditional South African mural art. This investigation includes South African wall decorations, which have possibly been influenced by oral tradition and traditional beliefs in the three black linguistic groups based in the northern part of Limpopo Province.

Nettleton (1984a:18) notes that,

In most studies on African art, an anthropological approach to the society and its artefacts is adopted, and in those few cases where style is considered at all it is dealt with as an entity separate from the socio-cultural matrix.

It is also important to bear in mind that the political differences affected the coherence of the cultural background as well as the tribal wall decorations. The traditional homes across South Africa are similar to those of the three linguistic groups in Limpopo Province. Their homes appear to have common markings, signs and symbols that can be interpreted as a means of self-expression and to communicate a message. It is believed that a written language developed using pictography and iconography to represent the expressive language.

According to Nabudere (2011:82),

One of the central areas of dialogue – and essential to the recreation of a holistic thinking – is the dialogue between the modern Western understanding of the role of language in the creation of knowledge and the ancient African understanding of it.

Consequently, the base for this argument is focused on the possibilities evident in an ancient expressive language that is embedded in the oral tradition and traditional beliefs, and interpreted through narratives in the form of a pictography of cosmic, animalist, and anthropomorphic representations, and what seems to be expressive decorative patterns of geometric shapes, e.g. lines, colours and symbols. This language, in the form of general philosophical ideas, can be traced and referenced back to an ancient form of writing similar to Egyptian hieroglyphics and Mesopotamian cuneiform which was started by the black people in Africa and somehow could have influenced the pictography, iconology and symbolism used by the Bantu speaking people of South Africa. It must be noted that there is evidence (cf. p4) of these kinds of ancient writings that had been interpreted as a means of communication in some of the ancient civilizations.

As mentioned before, it is common amongst the three linguistic communities in Limpopo to have sacred places for ancestral veneration. These places are in the form of mound shrines, rivers, mountains, stones, animal kraals, graves, etc. These places connected them to their oral tradition, beliefs and ancient practices whereby ancient languages in the form of symbols and shapes were used to signify and represent a communication tool. The personal belongings of a dead person, e.g. his/her utensils and figurines of family totems with carved or decorated patterns of geometric-like shapes, would be placed on the sanctified place.

Rituals were also performed. For example, according to Roscoe (1922:95-96), the Ankole king prepared the following ritual in the hut for the wedding of his sister to the man he chose her to marry:

... an attempt at decoration, patterns being painted in red, white and black over the common plaster which I found in the country, and it consisted only of straight lines arranged in geometrical patterns.

Roscoe (ibid) explains that during his travelling expedition to Central Africa in Mbarara, he noticed amongst the Ankole and Kigezi people, a hut that was painted simply with straight lines and patterns in white, red and black. Roscoe (op.cit.) possibly did not understand the symbolic meaning of colours, lines and patterns painted on the wall of the dwelling, except only to mention that the marriage was supposed to be blessed and made fruitful. However, a black African initiated in the traditional way of life, would have understood the importance of the King's sister and the husband spending time in the hut and the symbolic meaning of the colours in the painted lines and patterns on the wall. This possible lack of understanding by Roscoe is supported by Swantz's (1970) argument about the secrecy of the initiated Africans. Mutwa (1998) says that black Africans never disclose their secrets about their rituals. Roscoe (1922:95) further explains that

In the Zaramo society, these stages were mainly those, which came with physical maturing and growth, but there were also specialised areas of life in which special skills are needed. Secrets of such skills were revealed to an initiate who then through certain rites was introduced into the group of the skilled ones.

Mutwa (1964) adds that in both the ancient African and Bantu cultures of southern Africa, it is evident that only certain people were responsible for capturing these seemingly sacred symbols. Therefore, only the initiated were privy to the secrets of the divine, having access to the implied meanings of the symbols used in everyday decoration within the tribe.

However, the historical and excavated evidence throughout the various Bantu speaking communities along the migration routes indicate that pictorial symbolism, especially in the development of the written language, was largely universal, and many symbols appear to be similar. For example, the various artefacts discovered at Mapungubwe, which serve as a link between the ancient peoples of this area and the present day Vhavenda people.

Nettleton (1984a:18) explains that

The study of iconography in African art is as problematic as that of style, to which it is inextricably linked. In studying African art, the Western art historian is confronted by the art of cultures, which can be analysed in terms of an art-historical approach to iconography only where sufficient information on the cosmological beliefs, political and social

structures, and stylistic norm of each society is available. In most studies on African art, an anthropological approach to the society and its artefacts is adopted, and in those few cases where style is considered at all, it is dealt with as an entity separate from the socio-cultural matrix.

Thus, there is a need to explore the iconographical approach possibly linked to some of the oral and traditional beliefs that may depict symbols as well as stylized representation of animals with mythical meanings, as a symbolic language. This is supported by the historical and anthropological approach, as stated by Nettleton (1984a), who mentions that an analysis must be made of the meaning within a cultural context based on the conventional subject matter presented. This is also supported by Nabunere (2011) who emphasises the importance of understanding the epistemology and ethnology of a culture before writing on African cultures. Therefore, the symbolic language in this regard refers to the sacred language depicted as geometric forms or designs as well as stylized animal and human forms depicted as patterns, as per Nettleton's (1984a) findings on the Vhavenda. The three linguistic communities are full of mysterious animals, associated with taboo, birth, rebirth, death, and reincarnation. These animal forms could be representative of their ancestors. All these mysterious and symbolised animals who are sometimes believed to be visible or invisible, live in mountains, rocks with strange formations, the forest, the cosmos and underwater in rivers or in the sea.

Ralushai (1977:61) states that,

Every Venda avoids eating or coming into contact with a certain animal, bird, or inanimate object. It is believed that if he does not observe the custom, he loses his teeth or his teeth decay. A person who did not care about serving such customs was regarded as *daba-daba* (a fool, who is not a danger to himself and his community but is mentally unsound and not responsible for his actions).

These secretive animals and celestial beliefs are part of the Vhavenda, Balobedu and Vatsonga people's traditional beliefs. Like other people in the world, they were fascinated by human origin, nature, weather, animals, man and the creator. The Vhavenda used mysterious animals with symbolic meanings in their customs, animalism totems, and anthropomorphic and ancestral beliefs. The chosen ones who possessed powers linked to the ancestors, e.g. the sangomas, communicated with the

ancestors, and enabled the tribe to ask their ancestors for favours, good fortune, health, abundance, protection from evil forces, etc. The ancestors could also be appeased in this way.

Ralushai (1977:62) remarks that "All the sacred groves that I have seen are covered with vegetation, as people are forbidden to fetch fire wood from such places". The sacred places are dense with vegetation because they are the burial places where rituals are performed. If an animal is seen coming out from that undergrowth, people think that an ancestor just appeared. If a snake with an unusual colour comes out of the vegetation, it is thought to be an ancestor and no one is allowed to kill it.

The mystical animals that are connected to ancestral veneration are important in the lives of the people in Limpopo Province. The locals know how to interpret and explain the symbolic meanings of the sudden appearance of these animals.

Roscoe (1922:80) noticed a similar belief among the Bantu in South Africa and the Ankole people from Central Africa about the soul of the deceased:

They believe in the transmigration of Royal souls, and the king is therefore not identified after death, as are the kings of Buganda and Bunyoro, but is thought to pass to what we should consider a lower grade and take the form of a lion.

The people respected nature and the cosmos because they knew that people were connected to animals with super powers and that they could communicate with these animals by magic in the form of visual expressive representation language.

In the Vhavenda fertility ceremony performed during the *domba* dance, an initiated woman would have a little snake inside her body to help with the development of the foetus (Ralushai, 1977; Schlosser, 2009:12; Nettleton, 1984b:v). The snake is called *Mabidige* (dodging, zigzag movement, especially of *tharu*, the python). The children were told that there is a snake in the women's womb that makes the baby grow.

It is believed that different animals have significant roles to play in the creation of life. They are also used for medicinal purposes and charms to help women conceive. A man or woman initiate from the

village who is familiar with the secrets of communicating with the ancestors during ceremonies, is asked to make an image of the animal/s (usually from wood) that is used in the ceremonies.

Joyce (2009:99) mentions that animals played a role in the creation stories and myths. Animals with special powers, according to these myths and stories, were used as family totems.

Symbolism plays a significant role within the subgroups, some of whom have evolved systems of animal totems, e.g. the lion (*tau*), the baboon (*thlewene*), and the crocodile (*kwena*), that reinforce collective identity but also carry a deeper meaning. The names are honoured in folktales, dance and song, and the animals as well as their images, are regarded with respect verging on reverence. Historically, members of a group would address each other by the totemic epithet, e.g. a Pedi would be addressed as *noko* (porcupine), a Lobedu as *kolobe* (bushpig), and a Mamathola as *nare* (buffalo).

The use of animal totemic symbolism in these three communities is similar to other Bantu groups in South Africa who have totemic origins that are not mentioned by Joyce, e.g. the *batlaping* (fish), the *ndlovu* (elephant), and *humba* (snail). The totemic animalism of these communities is taken very seriously for them to identify each other.

Stoffberg (1988:56) mentions that:

The Sotho and the Venda people believe in a ritualistic and mystical link between people and certain animals or objects. The totem has a magical-religious foundation. The totem is sacred but is not an object of worship, although certain rules of taboo do surround the totem. Members of the same totem group are not prohibited to one another. Children always belong to the same totem group as that of the father. Occasionally a totem group will change their totem for another. When this happens, the prohibition rules (taboo) attached to the previous totem fall away.

It is common practice for local South African tribes to greet each other with their totem animal. This helps young people looking for a partner to avoid getting married to relatives. To establish the totemic, they follow up on this initial information by enquiring who the father or grandfather is. The clan also refrains from eating the meat of their totem animal. Often they make symbols or recognisable images

of the animal to alert others in the community or visitors to their clan. This serves as a welcome or warning to those who approach their home.

Ralushai (1977) mentions that amongst these three linguistic communities, the Vhavenda also had other belief structures in the form of *matzhomane* or *manzhozi* (ancestors). The Vatsonga, AmaZulu and Amaswazi inherited these possession cults from the Nguni. The Vhavenda gained the possession cult, known as the *ngoma dza vadzimu* or *malombo* (ancestors), from the Lembethu-Kalanga. The Singo (Vhavenda clan) were known to possess a magical drum that protected them from their enemies. Their king could protect his people by beating this magical drum called *ngoma lungundo* (drum of the dead) to instil fear in the enemies. According to some Vhavenda, they believe that this king disappeared from his kraal one night with this special drum and neither were ever seen again. They suppose that the king vanished into the *mashovhela* (rock pool in the Sun Nature Reserve). It is thought that in the morning, you can still hear his drum in the echoes of the cliffs. This is considered the second most sacred site in Venda culture.

The three linguistic communities in Limpopo Province believe that the spirit world is under the ground, in caves, in trees, under deep pools of water, or in the sea. It is common for the people to believe that huge rivers and lakes, such as the Fundudzi (under the water), are the home of the ancestors. According to the oral stories, there is a complete village under Lake Fundudzi, where on a still, dark night, the household fires can be seen, and singing and dancing, and the sounds of cattle and sheep can be heard.

According to Elliot (1970:100), the spirits of the ancestors work through the People of the River. Pauw (1975:130) concurs by saying that

The association some clans have with particular rivers where they perform special sacrifices for their ancestors may relate to this belief in a land of the ancestors below rivers.

Like the story of the king at the Mashovhela rock pool, who lives under water, and the village under Lake Fundudzi, the Xhosa people believed that some ancestors lived in the water. They believed that the ancestors in the river spoke to a young girl prophet, known as Nongqawuse, about their wish to return bringing with them cattle and food for the living, to help send the white settlers back to the sea. This overlap in beliefs indicates that there is a common belief system in southern Africa among the Bantu people.

To support Pauw's (1975) statement, Elliot (1970:97) further mentions that, according to the Xhosa people:

The People of the River are the same size as humans and have long hair down to their shoulders, like the white people, but their skin can be any colour ... white, yellow or black. There are men, women and children, they have families and babies, but do not wear clothes. Their wrists and ankles are "soft" (a suggestion of flippers*).

The researcher assumes that the People of the River refers to the ancestors in general, whereas "ancestor" normally refers to a deceased member of a person's own family. It is important to note that only the "normal" ancestors may appear to the living in a dream. The People of the River (who apparently are never seen in dreams) may be seen playing in a body of water, be it a lake, a river or the sea. It is also believed that the People of the River cause the waves, waterspouts, and the wind.

The People of the River can get married, have children and keep animals, whereas the "normal" ancestors cannot. The general opinion of most Africans today is that the People of the River are not technically ancestors, as they are not dead relatives. The three linguistic groups in Limpopo Province believe that when somebody drowns in a river, the People of the River have called that person; the drowned person is not in fact dead but merely living with the People of the River.

2.5 Significance of oral tradition, traditional beliefs, signs and symbolism incorporated into the homes within the three linguistic groups in Limpopo Province

The lives of Africans were transformed by migration, wars, trade, and colonization. Inter-cultural mixing, the exchange of ideas, and in some cases, forced religion that influenced their beliefs and culture, shaping and changing the Africans' way of practicing their various belief systems. However, many of the traditional beliefs and practices, customs, values, cultures, taboos and ancestral beliefs are still practiced today by the descendants of those who once lived in Dzata, Mapungubwe and the Great Zimbabwe ruins, e.g. in their settlements and in the style of their homes. These peoples form part of the groups currently living in the Vhavenda, Balobedu and Vatsonga areas.

Joyce (2009:12) mentions that the Mapungubwe citadels were established "around mid-tenth century as a trade and commerce centre". People would come from as far as Asia, Arabia and Europe, bringing with them their art, culture, religion and architecture.

Schwerdtfeger's (2007) states that traders and clerics introduced the religion of Islam to West Africa in the tenth century. The Hausa, Nigeria, Burkino Faso and other tribes in the west, converted to Islam and Christianity, causing the cross-pollination of their traditional architecture and decoration with symbolic and aesthetic decorative designs. Therefore, it may be assumed that somehow these influences trickled down to Mapungubwe and the Great Zimbabwe ruins during the migration and trade eras.

Schlosser (2009:82) reveals that symbolism also played a significant role for the Balodedu, e.g. in Sethakong, the Royal home of the Rain Queen, "the holy stones" that represent the paternal ancestors can be found in the homestead of the chief. The higher stones represent the women and the smaller stones the men. Their strong magical powers protect the homestead at night, and may give blessings and good fortune. One amongst many traditional practices and beliefs common to the Balobedu, Vatsonga and Vhavenda regarding their homes and settlements is that they are protected against witchcraft and evil spirits. According to their custom, before a house is built, a *sangoma* (traditional healer) from the village is asked to perform a ritual to announce the new house to the ancestors and to protect it using *muthi* (medicine).

Denyer (1978) argues that the Dogon people in West Africa built their houses on rocky cliffs in the form of a man on his side in the act of procreation. The man's head was symbolically associated with the hearth, the stores with his arms, the stables with his legs, the central workroom with his belly, and the grinding stones with his genitalia. The huts women used when they were menstruating symbolised the hands and chest. The hollowed stone for grinding millet symbolises the male and female sexual organs.

Denyer (1978:20) adds that:

The Dogon philosophy on the village is based on the idea of germinating cells, vibrating along a spiral path to break out of a world egg. The spiral and the egg shape therefore had

special significance. Each village was laid out either in a square to represent the first field cultivated by man or in an oval with a hole at one end to represent the world egg broken open by the spirally vibrating cells.

The Africans believed that a village, a homestead and huts were living entities, i.e. they were represented anthropomorphically. These dwelling places were carefully planned and kept safe through magical protection. The arrangement of the homes had social structure and religious symbolic meaning. Their sanctuaries, dedicated to the ancestors, were covered with rectilinear checkerboard designs, and their granaries with wooden doors and locks were carved with multiple human figures. This could be considered an ancient symbolic language, which was a warning sign to the family members and possibly to the broader community. It could be assumed that the ancestors to whom the sanctuary was dedicated and the initiates who created the sanctuary understood the symbolism well.

The Dogon people's traditional beliefs and architectural symbolism are possibly the surviving indigenous structures of the Ione Age elliptical building and acropolis ruins of the Great Zimbabwe. Those ancient ruins possibly influenced the Zimbabweans, Vhavenda, Balobedu and later the Vatsonga people who settled in Limpopo Province.

By the 20th Century, the cylindrical, single cell house with a conical thatch roof was the common architectural design used by South Africans in their villages. However, different roof designs, i.e. flat, low, or high conical pitched roofs, are also common. The houses are erected in a circular shape. The walls are made of poles placed in a circle and waffles of basket weave mixed with cow dung plaster the walls. A courtyard was erected in the centre with low mud walls to connect the homes. Included was a granary and a place for cooking (kitchen) that was built in the same shape and with the same materials. A cattle pen was built by some tribes in the middle of the houses and by others at the rear end of the yard.

Language (2009:320) argues that the cattle pen held a significant place in the family and that was where the head of the family was buried. It was also used for the ancestral sacrifices, and was regarded as a sacred place where no women were allowed. Mohale (2014:49) add that according to the Balobedu,

Ancestors have their favourite places where they meet and form unity. This is the place where the pulse of the family is; it would be marked by different objects. ... different communities of the Balobedu people call it *thugula* (shrine), which is marked by a river pebble, a stick, earth mound or *thithikwane* (lily).

As already mentioned, the building styles were influenced by population movements from one area to the next during the last century. The changing economic, political and social standards could be another factor that contributed to the architectural styles. New building materials, such as corrugated iron sheeting and cement, were introduced from Europe and the policies of the colonial governments forced Africans to change their rural settlement patterns.

The land was expropriated to accommodate settlers and new developments. The locals had to abandon their scattered settlements, come down from the mountains where they lived to protect themselves from the stronger enemies. Many of the locals working on the mines were grouped together into "modern" rows of four room houses and African tribes were moved to different areas, separate from the whites. The government was able to build towns, medical facilities, create employment and provide education. The pastoralist life-style of the African changed; the grazing areas for the animals became smaller leading to overgrazing, which led to soil erosion.

2.6 African traditional *maguva* (walls around the courtyard) with influences from oral tradition and traditional beliefs

The study and analysis of African mural art is a complex task because of the vast number of countries, tribes and languages spoken. It is also important to bear in mind the political differences that affected the coherence of the cultural backgrounds as well as their wall decorations. In addition, the visual communicative ways of the African people through their artistic styles were affected by numerous historical factors, such as migration, colonization, urbanization and modernization with its consequences. The evidence of common trends and influences are traceable. This is clearly seen in the visual expressive language of most groups in Limpopo Province.

As mentioned previously, in the seventeenth century, the descendants of the Vhangona, Singo (today known as the Vhavenda) and related groups, were the first to cross the Limpopo River and settle in

Limpopo Province. Around the mid eighteenth century, the Balobedu arrived and settled southeast of Limpopo Province. At about 1840, the Vatsonga refugees entered and settled in the Vhavenda and the Balobedu areas. These three linguistic groups had a significant influence on each other. As all these groups were nomads and pastoralists, their architecture was made of natural materials. In the villages, their homes were spaced apart from each other. The arrangement of their homes had significant and symbolic meanings in the community. Presumably, the indigenous Africans lived this way.

Schwerdtfeger (2007:227) supports this argument by adding that although the antiquity of the decorations on the architecture of West Africa have undergone changes and influences, they nevertheless survived. However, "it still carries a distinct meaning, known sometimes only to the craftsman and his customer and sometimes to the society as a whole". From the late 1960s to the present, traditional wall decorations in Limpopo Province showed a change in representation, content and symbolic subject, which could have been caused by the political turmoil, forced removals and migrant labour during the apartheid era. Not much was done to preserve and record the traditions on the murals and personal and functional objects of the Bantu people in South Africa. However, the signs and symbols of the visual expressive language of the African traditional murals captured their intrinsic meaning visually, i.e. what had been transliterated orally was transposed through oral tradition and then depicted as part of the expressive and communicative language of pictography, which can be an ancient form of writing. Therefore, oral tradition was believed to capture the essence of the culture, which is not expressed in text writing.

Nettleton (1984a:19) mentions that Panosky (1962) worked out three steps of meaning in African art: "primary or natural subject matter, secondary or conventional subject matter, and intrinsic meaning or content". These three steps may be easily recognized and understood by a person from the same cultural background. Thus, the viewer will recognize the lines, shapes, forms and colour portrayed in the art and be able to tell whether what he/she sees is a human or animal form or a scene from nature.

The various historical migration routes by black South Africans indicated that the pictorial symbolism was largely universal and many signs and symbols from different ethnic groups appear to be similar, especially in the development of what is perceived to be a visual expression on the traditional mud walls in the form of decoration. In the same way, symbols used in tribal wall decorations could be

considered as a symbolic visual expressive language. These appear predominantly as geometric, stylized anthropomorphic shapes, such as plants, and female and phallic symbols. As it is today, it seems that women were the captors of this ancient language through building and decorating the walls of the mud houses using celestial decorations, plants forms, mythological creatures and the totem animals of their clans. The women also told stories and were the carers and educators of the young. Thus, women can be considered the keepers of the traditions and the curators of the indigenous knowledge systems and wisdom structures.

Denyer (1978) mentions that the African homestead, village plans and wall decorations had religious and symbolic meanings and were mainly basic design shapes. They later displayed a mix of Christian, Islamic, and traditional African knowledge systems and wisdom structures about the creation myth, cosmology and nature.

Regarding Hausa architecture, Schwerdtfeger (2007) mentions that the strong Islamic influence on the indigenous African wall decorations are grouped into representational and non-representational motifs and designs. In the representation of figuratively and beautifully decorative designs, such as the Star of David, spiders, snakes, lizards, hoes and swords were used as a cast the real thing; whereas the non-representational, such as guns and swords, was used as a warning. It must be noted that this was not Islamic art, as Islam forbids the representational drawings or paintings of humans and animals. However, the creators would extend their boundaries, go against the restrictions, and make what the client requested.

Decoration and design can also serve as a psychological warning or to reduce uncertainty or awkwardness in places of significance or areas of restriction as spatial boundary points in the built features (such as homesteads; granaries; grinding sheds; sacred ceremonial, community buildings; wives room; doorways; inner walls; and roof pinnacles). In their architecture, they used natural resources that were good for the climate and environment, such as stones, clay, earth and vegetation. Thus, some materials used were not permanent and were prone to termites and rotting. Some would use building materials with various designs to complement their lifestyle as pastoralists.

These communities had slightly different cultural and traditional beliefs. In some instances, what was totemic to the Balobedu and Vhavenda, was not totemic to the Vatsonga. They had different views about sexuality, morality, marriage patterns, the hierarchy of age, the position of women, the way they dealt with death and the magic in rainmaking

Denyer (1978:159) urges that, "Theories about architectural styles are almost as much a part of a culture as the styles themselves". The influence from Arabic traders, such as the Berber Islamic and Muslim cultural decorations on the architecture, became an adopted way of life for some indigenous Africans. The Portuguese, who brought Christian signs and symbols, also influenced the way homes were decorated and the effects of colonial architecture changed the African village setup. However, some African indigenous people combined their indigenous decoration styles with colonial influences in their African architecture. Their knowledge and understanding of oral tradition and traditional beliefs assisted in their creativity. For instance, the Nguni (Swati and the early Xhosa) and the South Sotho construct a dome using poles in a circle covered by thatch grass. In contrast to this, it was a common trend amongst the Vhavenda to add a veranda to their homes. In the Vhavenda, Balobedu and Vatsonga communities, it was common practice for the women to decorate low walls and homes, and to sculpt in the courtyard with coloured clay, cow dung and paint.

Nettleton (1984a:20) explains that African motifs and patterns may be given significance from the way they are used. Therefore, as religious symbols, they can be classified as iconography, e.g. chevrons, zigzags, organic and inorganic shapes. It must be acknowledged that images of mystic animals from African mythologies were visualized in stylized shapes, designs and patterns, which were used on their walls for decorations. The images for symbolical values expressed multiple meanings depending on the context. Images of animals that had negative influences in the creation myths, e.g. a chameleon and tortoise, because of their slowness, are not portrayed in the home decoration styles. However, snakes and lizards, because of their cleverness and speed, beautiful patterns, colours, and body shape, are always stylized, simplified, and portrayed in their wall decorations. Other creatures, depending on their role in the oral tradition and beliefs of the different communities, are used for the same purpose.

Denyer (1978:116) explains that

In common parlance, decoration implies conscious effort on the part of the creator to order his materials into a type of design, which will be pleasing to the eye. This design may also have some magical or religious significance, but this is of course not always apparent to the outside viewer.

In this regard, it seems that to the outsider, i.e. a European, the decorations on African architecture are senseless apart from the artist's skill with the materials used. Whereas, to the Africans living in Limpopo Province, the designs and decorations have psychological significance and social impact. Some of the community members will understand what the decorations communicate.

Seemingly, the iconographical analysis has classified some motifs with distinct or peculiar aspects. Such distinct motifs might have zigzag forms, which in some tribes such as the Vhavenda, attach meaning to the symbol of a specific snake, such as the python; the scales on a crocodile's back; and the shape and patterns on a tortoise's shell. The Vhavenda, who are familiar with some of the motifs, would recognize a zigzag as the python movement simulated in the *domba* (python snake dance). This traditional, ritualistic dance originated from the myth of Lake Funduzi and the magical snake that lives in the lake.

2.7 Oral tradition, traditional beliefs and visual expressive language

It is believed that African oral and traditional beliefs play a major role in the everyday life of Africans. The visual creative expressive language draws its influences from their mythologies, ideographs, and the use of totemic and mystic animals with super power. To emphasise the importance of this investigation, one is reliant on what connotation the people under investigation ascribe to certain oral and traditional beliefs in the representation of patterns, shapes, signs, symbols and colours in the pictography. Although they may once have had a traditional meaning, it may be acknowledged that today these meanings are lost in most cases. The modern interpretations seem to have more relevance for Africans today and are quite likely to include many Western influences and nuances (albeit Africanized).

Nabudere (2011:39) explains that "what is expressed is embodied in such a way that it is made manifest by expression, and something is manifest when it is directly available to be seen and felt". This research accepts Nabudere's (2011:39) explanation of what is expressive. Therefore, the oral and traditional beliefs of the three linguistic groups in Limpopo Province pertain to creative expressive language in the mythologies, such as the creation myth, the idea of the gods, ideographs for sign language, and that the use of animals with super powers is interpreted and connected to their ethnographic cultural belief. It seems that the audience understood the expressive language used when narrating or visualizing the art form.

Most Africans acknowledge oral and traditional beliefs whereby knowledge is passed down from one generation to the next by word of mouth. Mutwa (1964:530), the well-known keeper of oral tradition, storyteller, visual artist, and sangoma (Zulu term for a diviner and/or spiritual healer) states that

Knowledge is controlled among the Bantu by the orders of the chosen ones. Only certain knowledge is passed on to particular high ones of the tribe, such as they are required to know how to execute their duties. Very little knowledge is passed on to the common people and nothing is ever disclosed to strangers. In this regard, their knowledge was kept very secretive and would not be shared with the uninitiated. Regarding this, it would have been difficult for the European and the Arabs to get information about the secret knowledge of the people.

It is assumed that the chosen high ones were people with ability, skills and creativity acquired both formally and informally. The keepers of the oral tradition and traditional beliefs, who were aware of the artistic value of the oral tradition, taught the chosen ones the history, beliefs, culture, religion, mythology, legends, and stories of their particular tribe. The narrators of the oral tradition were women with artistic and decorative skills that were applied on the wall decorations.

In some cases, members of the community may have been selected to memorize the genealogy of the nation, and to convey it to the next generation. Mutwa (1964: xiv) states that

There are men and women, preferably with black birth-marks on either palm of the hands, with good memories and a great capacity to remember words and to repeat them exactly as they heard them spoken. These people were told the history of the tribes, under oath

never to alter, add or to subtract any word. Anyone who so much as thought of changing any of the stories of his tribe, that he had been told, fell immediately under a "high curse" which covered him, his children and his children's children. These tribal storytellers were called guardians of the *Umlando* or Tribal History.

The aim of the oral histories was to answer questions about their world, e.g. why something was in a certain way. Generally, oral history had only content and little fixed form or style. They did not have a fixed framework like in fictitious tales. During the initiation rituals, young women and young men would be educated about how the family works.

Finnegan (1970:351) mentioned that,

The reason for telling the oral history or historical stories was not so much to entertain, but rather to educate and inform people about important facts and to equip them against dangers in their specific cultural environment.

Scheub's (1975:5) adds that,

According to the Xhosa people the *amabali* (oral history) had been revered as true by the narrator and his audience and they were set in an era which was contextually accurate from the narrator's point of view.

Stories specifically for children were told at night around the fire. The types of stories told to people would differ according to the age of the audience, e.g. some stories targeted children, some adolescents, and some adults. Stories with a moral or simply for amusement were told to anybody, no matter his/her age, but in most cases, amusing stories were aimed at the youth for entertainment. The stories with a moral were educational and formative. The narrator/artist would take the original story and shape and model it to express the theme/core of the story, which was directed at the audience. The narrator might blend the original story with details taken from contemporary life.

The narrator would probably have been a respected woman with artistic talents. These artistic skills, depicted on the walls of the dwellings and adornments, would have been regarded as an art form that blossomed and died with the change of seasons. The artist will regularly use shapes of plants, colourful

flowers, geometric shapes, motifs and reliefs. This art form would have been commonly practiced in villages similar to the Manala Ndebele people, who share the same oral and traditional beliefs as the people under investigation.

According to Becker (1979:69),

When a site has been selected for a new home, the *manala* summon a medicine man whose function, among other things, is not only to solicit the blessing of the ancestors, but also to ensure that the future occupants will be protected against the insidious activities of the sorcerers and other evildoers. Taking a sacrificial sheep provided for the occasion by the owner of the hut to be built, the medicine man daubs it with indigenous medicine and then cuts its throat with a single stroke of a razor-sharp knife. The moment the carcass has been skinned and cut open, he gathers the entrails, which he deposits in the centre of the chosen site. Now he sprinkles the building materials-pegs, poles and thatching grass with protective and purifying medicines. Then the work begins amidst the hubbub of rejoicing spectators.

The women within the community would help one another to build a hut and to decorate the home. Women usually worked in groups, but some would work alone. In completing various tasks, e.g. a cooking or sleeping area, the women would probably have created a group or personal style with techniques that would flourish in the village. Usually women of a certain age and status within the society practiced this communal effort. The person who decorated the traditional walls was probably a creative and artistic narrator who used visual images to tell the stories instead of reverting to word of mouth. Different communities had their own way of expression, using visual patterns, colours and shapes that included messages in the form of numbers, text, totem animals and symbolic designs that were understood by only certain people within the community. This enabled them to display their artistic skills.

The oral traditionalist used artistic language, which once expressed by an informed narrator would become a beautiful means of self-expression that could be visualized through linguistic devices. Furthermore, a keeper of traditional knowledge and wisdom, with muralist and narrative skills, could use the expressive language of signs, symbols, shapes, and colours to express her/himself on the

decorated wall. Therefore, the symbolic meaning in the oral language and the visual narratives were commonly emphasized with certain symbolism, patterns, shapes, plants, animals and colours that were often depicted and understood by the locals in the villages and probably by their neighbours as well.

The oral tradition may be categorized as follows:

Imaginative narratives

- Poetry
- Riddles
- Proverbs
- Historical narratives

All the above forms of narrative depended in some way on imagery from everyday life within the community and their associated experiences, which were artistically tailored to function in contemporary life. Imaginative narratives depended on images fashioned by both the artistic tradition and by contemporary life; performers blended these and structured them in various ways. The artist would have taken the original story then shaped and modelled it to express the theme/core of the imaginative narratives, which was directed at the audience. The artist might have blended details taken from contemporary life with the original story. The people lived in a world where they had a first-hand knowledge of the story. For the audience to better enjoy and understand the moral of the story, they used tools to enhance the storytelling.

The artist depended largely on audience participation for a more entertaining experience and the artist would often use gestures, movement, body language, and mimicry, as tools to better portray the imagery. The art of poetry was a flourishing practice among the linguistic communities of Limpopo Province and is still evident to this day. Most leaders had their own poet or courtly poets.

Scheub (1975:22) mentions that,

Both children and adults were to be poets, composing lyrics relating to kings, to themselves, to their cattle and their dogs. Certain images became tied to certain personalities or categories of leadership but the artistic characteristics of the form, remained constant.

Historical stories were composed of local events, which were passed down by family tradition, such as war, famine, and drought. In most cases, these narratives are exact regarding time and places but many were supplemented by fantasy. Kaschula (2001: xv) mentions that "these narratives dealt mainly with the history of past rulers, military leaders or folk heroes of the particular society". In some cases, the people believed that a long-dead member of the tribe had once saved the whole community from a disaster. This would form the basis for a historical narrative or event.

2.8 Influence of oral tradition, ancestral beliefs and superstitions applied on the utility objects and homes as a visual expressive language of signs and symbols

It is supposed that the three linguistic groups in Limpopo Province believed in life after death and that the departed become ancestors of a family. If a king, queen or chief died, they become the ancestors of the community they ruled.

Hammond-Tooke (1937:318) argues that this African belief, unlike in other religions, is firmly rooted in the social structure, and membership of cult groups is determined by birth (they are thus, by their very nature, non-proselytizing), the objects of worship are structurally determined, and they are quite unashamedly this-worldly in orientation. Unlike Christianity, for example, which accept suffering as inevitable and indeed necessary, merely promising grace to face it, all Bantu religions are concerned with attaining the goal life here on earth, and their rituals tend to be essentially pragmatic.

Hammond-Tooke (1937) further reminds us that the African belief in life after death is not based on the theology of heaven and hell, but on a concept of the creator who created the earth, cosmos, man and animals who does not associate himself with the problems of his creation. The creator is mentioned only when they communicate or honour their ancestors.

Joyce (2009:13) and Language (2009) agree with Hammond-Tooke (1937) who says that, ancestral believers, despite their minor differences in daily practices, still believed in the importance of the ancestral spirit: in worship, veneration, guidance and the Creator who is the life-giving source.

The believers tend to trust that the souls of the deceased become ancestral spirits as their most intimate *badimo, bazimo, milimo, badimo, swikwembu* (gods) who act as intermediaries between the living and the spiritual world. They are regarded as their ancestors who once lived on earth as human beings and who once loved and cared for them; without their assistance and leadership, their descendants would not progress.

As mentioned before, it seems that the people of the three linguistic communities in Limpopo Province believed that their ancestors passed to a new world where they are still alive as spirits and who live as they lived in this world. Death was not seen as the end of life, but as the beginning of an afterlife. The spirit of the dead was alive; it could communicate with the living and express its feelings, wishes, and ask favours from the living in exchange for their good fortune and health. It had the power to intervene in the affairs of its families and larger communities. The ancestors of the king or a chief also have powers to bless or punish by sending drought, a cattle plague, tribal or personal disaster, sickness or death. If an offence or transgression was committed, the living must ask for forgiveness by slaughtering a beast under the guidelines of a spiritual leader.

Ralushai (1977) indicates that the king, queen, chiefs, priests and priestesses were the only people who could communicate with the paternal ancestors of the community. It was common knowledge to the Vhavenda and the Balobedu that Raluvhimba/Mwali, the supreme creator, was in charge of the astronomical and physical rainmaking magic and could control the weather, especially the rain. Ralushai (1977) adds that the royal family members, i.e. the chief, priest, priestess, and *makhadzi* (princess), were very important figures in the rainmaking process, as they had been sworn to the secret knowledge for these kinds of rituals. However, to bring rain through the appropriate sacrifices and rituals, which were made to evoke the tribal ancestors, the supreme deity also had to be involved.

The tribe also considered that the ancestors of their royal family were a source of guidance. In these matters, only the chief could act as mediator between the tribe and his ancestral spirits. The chief received the wisdom and power to lead and guide his subjects from his ancestors.

Mohale (2014) mentions that the Balobedu had their own techniques for controlling the natural forces that could cause disasters. Malevolent people, such as witches, were believed to bring disease and death. When they died, they became malicious ancestors, and had the power to evoke evil to the tribe and their descendants. Like the Balobedu, the Xhosa believe that if one quarrels with someone, one must make peace with that person before that person dies because, as an ancestor, that person might send one bad luck.

Pauw (1975) adds that amongst other blacks in South Africa, the Xhosa also believed that the ancestors aided them in destroying evil in their community. The living could also offer the ancestors food and talk to them, thanking them for good harvests and the multiplication of their animals. The spirits of the ancestors could be invited to attend certain rituals, such as a birth, initiation, marriage, and death. In addition, cattle could be killed only when the ancestors requested it. In some cases, traditional beer is brewed for the ancestors to thank them for giving good health to the family. Ritual killings could also be carried out if an ancestor communicated with a family member in a dream. While the family elders were normally the most expert at interpreting the meaning of dreams, when in doubt, the *mungoma* (the foreseer) was consulted for an explanation. Sometimes, the dream indicated that the ancestors wanted food or drink, or that either good fortune or misfortune would occur. For example, if the dream prediction indicated a misfortune, like the illness of a family member, then the family elders consulted the ancestors to find a way of preventing it. If there was sickness in the family, the *mungoma* (the foreseer) would be consulted. If witchcraft was suspected, they would consult a *qhirha* (traditional doctor) in the belief that the ancestors would help to heal the sick person.

2.9 Summary

The political situation in South Africa had a devastating impact on the traditions of the various tribal groups. Westernization and the apartheid system did not only affect the movement of people from rural to urban areas, it also impacted on the people's oral traditions, art, and way of life. Traditionally, people from the north of Limpopo Province had a rich tribal culture in which oral tradition, as a legitimate

genre, played a significant role in entertainment and education. However, the socio-political and economic system divided people along racial lines and forced them to leave the rural areas and move to towns and cities far removed from their traditional homes, often taking their oral traditions with them.

Seemingly, very few black South Africans continue to practice their oral traditions in all the provinces across South Africa, as they are trapped in limbo between westernization and traditional practice. According to Lee (1931:27), "The tales are already becoming modified by recent storytellers, because of the influx of modern ideas". This, in turn, appears to have prompted the development of tribal wall decorations, presumably influenced by oral tradition and traditional beliefs. Unfortunately, these were later polluted by their new urban life style. Although these people are now mostly urbanized, some still practice the remains of their oral traditions in some rural areas.

In spite of this, the oral traditions and traditional beliefs of the people from Limpopo Province form a basic means of self-realization; it expands their knowledge of the past and the present. While the nomadic flux of black South Africans caused them to leave their sculptures behind, they carried with them their oral tradition. Occasionally, the rite of passage is linked with secret ritual performances, often done on different body parts that express sacred meanings for the lifecycle, i.e. rites of birth, puberty, marriage, child bearing and death. The body decorations, ornamentation, and applied art with symbols that were used in their wall decorations, might have played a significant role in preserving and carrying the secret language that influenced the oral traditions and wall decorations. The evidence of common trends and influences on tribal traditions, iconography, symbols and signs is traceable. It is clearly seen in the traditional art and crafts of the Vhavenda, Vatsonga and Balobedu. In the Mopani and Vhembe districts of Limpopo Province, the Vatsonga and the Balobedu, also known as the Badogwa and the Vhavenda, live in an integrated manner. This migration and cultural integration resulted in the merging of tribes. As a result, these tribes have adopted and adapted cultural practices, such as dance, dress, wall art, rituals and oral tradition. This melting pot of cultural traditions will be a key area of focus in this study with emphasis on the overlapping oral traditions and symbols used by the various tribes in their wall decorations and patterns as it is used in wall decorations, adornments and on utensils.

The Bantu tribes in the northern Limpopo Province amalgamated – interweaving their oral history and traditional beliefs. This impact was carried over from generation to generation through their oral tradition. Scheub (1975) mentions that in some parts of South Africa, oral tradition is still used as an educational device to impart the history of the community by means of children's stories, rituals and dances, as a narrative of their culture.

Therefore, there seems to be little information available about the important activities encountered in the migration route, such as the architecture, social and economic processes, political beliefs and traditional matters of Africans. Presumably, any documented encounters of the black African migration that is not interpreted in the oral tradition or any visual representation may be regarded as not based on facts, but on biased assumptions and incorrect evidence.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the research design and methodologies employed in this study. To explore the problem statement and questions, the research design, as explained by De Vaus (2001), is applied.

The function of a research design is to ensure that the evidence obtained enables the initial question to be answered as ambiguously as possible. Obtaining relevant evidence entails specifying the type of evidence needed to answer the research question, to test a theory, to evaluate a program, or to describe some phenomenon accurately.

A good research design method should allow explanations and questions before collecting data. It should be systemic and logical to minimize the chances of collecting incorrect data and must ensure that the evidence gathered helps to respond to the questions or test the theories, hypothesis and ideas under investigation.

Furthermore, qualitative research methods, approaches, and theories that are appropriate for this study are employed. This method is suitable to achieve the aim of the investigation, which is the hypothesis. The qualitative method is used to collect and process data.

3.2 Qualitative research methodology

The three research methodologies can be used unconnectedly or collectively, depending on the theoretical attitude taken by the researcher relating to the nature of the social science study under examination. Researchers often confuse research methods with research design, which leads to poor evaluation of the design. According to Maxwell (2005:13), "qualitative design needs to be inductive, flexible, and tailored to the specific situation being studied".

This qualitative research is carried out in villages where the Balobedu, Vhavenda and Vatsonga are mixed, and in some villages where these linguistic groups are not mixed. In this case, the researcher

interacted with the people by observation and participation, and recorded everything related to the study that happened in their environment.

Walker (1985) notes that the qualitative research method is mostly unstructured and does not aim at getting accurate information by measuring the collected data. However, in quantitative research, the information can be individualised, construed and used creatively.

Walker (1985) is supported by Babbie (1995:83), who mentions that "Science is an enterprise dedicated to finding out". To find out the information for this research project, qualitative methodology that encompasses social and cultural context, languages, images, oral tradition, traditional beliefs, and other mechanisms of expressing meaning, were used. The qualitative research method was employed in conjunction with other methods such as a social survey and interviews.

Both qualitative and quantitative methods can be used as a mixed method to gain certain information on a social science project. In this sense, the quantitative research method was applied where the researcher required accurate measurements, explanations and descriptions of events, and accounts of social science.

Verhoeven (2011:38), as cited by Rambau (2015:38), says,

Qualitative data collection methods are methods that are interpretative by nature, they do not involve numbers, but use texts, open interviews, and observations and then the data is analysed.

The qualitative research method refers to social research that was carried out in the field where the researcher describes what was observed. In this case, the researcher observed specific communities to establish certain meanings and behaviour of the targeted people.

To collect data, qualitative approach interviews, and a questionnaire were employed. To clear further chances of confusion, the researcher used the qualitative scientific method, as explained by Mokwana (2009:15),

The qualitative interview is as an event in which one person (the interviewer) encourages others to freely articulate their interest and experiences. They point out that the interview technique has become so important that it is used in nearly all-qualitative research. This method is particularly relevant for eliciting large amounts of authentic data.

This method helps to solicit and gather information by inquiring about the past and present (known information) knowledge and experience of the interviewees. Whilst the interview is in progress, information is confirmed, substantiated, and noted for clarity and understanding. Likewise, research methodologies and theories must be appropriate for certain situations and the intended study.

Bergold and Thomas (2012: para.1) explain participatory research work as follows:

In practice, the participatory research style manifests itself in numerous participatory research strategies. Because of the individuality and self-determination of the research partners in the participatory research process, these strategies cannot be canonized in the form of a single, cohesive methodological approach, such as, for example, the narrative interview or qualitative content analysis. The dictum of process orientation and the appropriateness of the method to the subject under study is even more important in participatory research than in other approaches to qualitative research.

When the researcher intends to employ this qualitative research approach, he/she should be aware that this method demands that the researcher be observant and critical of any behaviour change in the participants. The interviews and conversations between the participants and the researcher should be professional in the sense that the researcher needs to lobby information without annoying the participants.

To get valid, concrete information, the researcher should be a team player who participates and, wherever possible, leads the discussions and debates without taking sides. The researcher must be well prepared and the questions asked should be clear and open ended to allow the participants to cover a vast area of knowledge.

Consequently, the researcher should know the theories of the people under investigation to find out their lived experience and interpretations of the subject matter. In this regard, practitioners, custodians of the indigenous knowledge and wisdom, and commoners in the communities were consulted and interviewed to understand how they perceive wall decorations as related to oral and traditional beliefs.

3.3 Research design

The research design should guide what needs to be done during the research. It becomes a tool that focuses on the whole research and makes it easy to follow systematically. The researcher must know beforehand what methods, approaches, and questions to ask in an interview. In this plan, the logistics and areas to be visited were arranged in such a way that they were easily accessible and problems were minimized. It included who to interview and how, and what was going to be sampled.

Rambau (2015:37), who cited Dew (1980:94), says:

A research design is a plan that provides a guideline on how to carry out research, in terms of choosing where the research will take place, who will be interviewed, how the interviews will be conducted, which documents will be consulted, and what or who will be observed.

The researcher first found out who were the custodians of indigenous knowledge and wisdom, oral traditions, and traditional beliefs as they related to the wall decorations. The researcher read the questions aloud to them before recording the interviews. An attempt was made to collect as many recordings of the interviews as possible in the different areas. The open-ended and close-ended questions focused on factors such as the use of linguistic devises, visual imagery and symbols used, if any. A formal analysis was made of each interview and a comparison drawn to compare the meanings and interpretations of oral traditions and traditional beliefs, symbols, signs, and geometric symbols on the decorated walls as they relate to the visual expressive language.

3.3.1 Qualitative questioning

The qualitative questioning often seemed unstructured and semi-structured, which was to be expected, as it explains itself as the unstructured method. The unstructured interview is also known as an in depth or open-ended interview. The researcher conducted the interviews.

Walker (1985) explains a qualitative interview as "a research method where the moderator needs to be skilled in asking questions", i.e. he/she must be able to understand and make quick decisions during the steering process. Although a set questionnaire is not used, it is appropriate to use a topic guide, i.e. a list of ideas, footnotes, terminology, etc. that can be used during the interview to help obtain valid and reliable data.

Adam and Schvaneveldt (1985:19) argue that,

Research methods, as illustrated and defined in the text, focus on empirical data. Empirical refers to phenomena or observations that are experienced or assessed by the senses - touch, sight, hearing, smell, or taste. Empiricism contrast with other approaches that do not rely on experimental-objective methods for the collection and analysis of data. The empirical oriented social scientist goes into the social world and make observations about how people live and behave.

The researcher observed a certain group of people in a social situation and gently guided the conversation from the general to the specific. The style of approach varied, the researcher was sometimes actively involved and sometimes passively. Questions that were unconnected to the research were also sometimes asked.

3.3.2 Case study

In this study, "case study" refers to the research design method that is most flexible, i.e. that allows the researcher to retain the general social science event of the people under investigation through empirical events. Generally, a case study is a practical method that researchers use when the inquiry about the group's real life situation is unclear between the context and the phenomenon. In other words, it is a multiple source of evidence used to clarify issues under examination. A case study is mainly used when a researcher is studying a group of people, such as in a workplace, company, settlement, or organization.

In this study, the researcher collected pictography of symbols, signs, images, oral traditions and traditional beliefs from the decorated walls known as *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers) and *maguva* (walls around the courtyard). During the interviews, the researcher used audio recordings and displayed pictures of decorated walls taken on previous visits to the villages of the three linguistic groups, i.e. the Vatsonga, Balobedu, and Vhavenda in Limpopo Province.

The interviews were conducted mostly with the Vatsonga in mixed villages. The questions aimed to find out whether the oral tradition and beliefs, narrated through pictographs containing basic geometric shapes, symbols, and signs, can be decoded and analysed for any meaning. The researcher observed and interacted with young and old women, men, and the keepers of traditional knowledge in the villages. The interviews took place in the interviewees' homes, where older women gathered to drink traditional beer, in the streets, at bus stops, and at taxi ranks.

3.3.3 Observation

"Observation strategy" is a method of collecting data through qualitative questions about people's behaviour in social science research. This method was employed because it allows the researcher to record the behaviour of everyday occurrences as they transpire naturally.

Adam and Schvaneveldt (1985:235), explain observational research as follows:

There are two types of observational strategies that place limits on the structural elements of behavioural setting. These techniques can be called the participant observer and the non-structured field observation methodologies. Both strategies allow behaviour to flow in its natural ecological sense (i.e., place few on the specifics of the behavioural settings, allowing behaviour to move from one ecological area to another, or from one space to another). However, the two strategies differ greatly on the type of observational rating techniques that are used. Participants' observer research is typically more informal, while the non-structured field study is usually highly formal in its rating strategy techniques.

In this investigation, the researcher applied observational research with low environmental structure to gather information. The low structured rating technique allowed the researcher to

observe and examine the subject during his/her day-to-day activities, whether cultural or social, to understand the broader social ecology. The researcher sometimes took an active role, i.e. played a member of the group, and sometimes was only an observer.

Informal rating was used in the data collection process, where notes and pictures of the participants were taken. Because of how this rating technique manifests, the information gathered was synthesized and organised to this specific type of research.

Wright and Losekoot (2012:421) cited by Rambau (2015:46), states that,

Participant observation is intended to allow the researcher to access symbols and meanings. They further argue that close contact and immersion in the everyday activities of the participant is necessary for understanding the meaning of actions and for defining situations and context.

Walker (1985:97) agrees with Wright and Losekoot (2012:421) and adds that,

The social survey is also important in introducing the researcher to the population. The anthropologist will have to explain his presence to each interviewee and people will then have at least some idea why the research is being conducted. This is not to argue any immediate social acceptance. The anthropologist is an outsider and people will undoubtedly be suspicious.

This method assisted in recording the pictography that contained geometric shapes, symbols, signs, and patterns of the subjects under scrutiny. The information that the researcher collected was used to prompt further discussions, questions, and answers in the sessions. It also helped to remind the respondents of certain facts, events, oral traditions and traditional beliefs that they might have forgotten to mention.

3.3.4 Survey method

The survey method is a means of collecting data on individuals and larger groups. It is an instrument preferred by social scientists when collecting original information on a larger population where the

response from the sampled individual respondents and groups represents the bigger population. This method is used for investigative and illustrative purposes.

According to Babbie (1998:255), "In a typical survey, the researcher selects a sample of respondents and administers a standardized questionnaire to them". Hence, in this research survey, a questionnaire was prepared specifically for the keepers of tradition, i.e. traditional healers, chiefs, storytellers, educators, and practitioners of wall decorations.

In this research methodology, the phenomenological approach was taken where the task was to examine the Vatsonga's traditional murals (better known as decorated walls) as they relate to their oral traditions and traditional beliefs, and how they translate the meanings in the symbols and signs used as narrative images. Decorating is an integral part of the social interaction of some local cultures. However, unlike the murals of the Ndebele, which are thriving but commercial, the murals of the Vatsonga and their neighbours, the Vhavenda and the Balobedu in the north eastern part of Limpopo Province, are not meant to attract tourists but to educate the people and narrate their traditions.

3.4 Data collection

During the pretesting of the data collected, the researcher made random visits to the villages of the three linguistic groups, the Vhavenda, Vatsonga, and Balobedu. According to the South African census of 2011, the Vatsonga population constituted 4.4 % to the population of South Africa. The census had the following breakdown of the Vatsonga population: Tzaneen municipal had 195 000, Louis Trichardt had 170 000, Thulamela had 220 000, and Letaba had 28000.

The villagers took the researcher to the *tindhuna* (local headmen), *tihosi* (chiefs), and the Queen Modjadji Place to establish how the culture and traditions are kept and practiced. The main data collection occurred in the Vatsonga settlements. The researcher's language background and the understanding of the oral, tradition and beliefs of the three linguistic groups under investigation made this comfortable to discuss issues around symbols, signs, marriage, death, taboos, oral traditions and traditional beliefs. The respondents who could speak Xitsonga were interviewed, and they explained the meanings of the symbols and designs on their traditional murals.

The data-collecting tool was written in English. However, as most of the respondents could not read or write in English, the researcher had to read and translate the questions into Xitsonga, and where the respondents did not understand the question, the researcher had to elaborate and explain it more thoroughly in their language, for clarity. The respondents were elderly people who could not read and write, so the researcher read the open-ended questions to the groups and reworded them where necessary. The researcher also gave examples so that they could respond honestly about what they had learned from their elders and what they know as part of their culture and tradition.

It must be acknowledged that qualitative research permits the researcher to use multiple researches in collecting evidence. The selection of a data-collecting method is prescribed by the researcher's interest, resources, circumstances, people under examination, and the capabilities of the intended tool to be employed. In the process of collecting data, it is expedient and necessary to use a questionnaire and interviews.

Adam and Schvaneveldt (1985:201) argue that,

Interviews and questionnaires can be extremely rigid or very open. The most distinctive thing about an interview, regardless of type or form, is that the respondent is orally presented with questions whereas in the questionnaire, regardless of type or form, the respondents are presented with a written question to which he or she directly responds. Each data collection device has merit and utility; the ultimate decision for using questionnaires over interviews would amongst other things depend on the purpose of the study, type of information needed, size and makeup of the sample, resources for conducting the study, the variable(s) to be measured, and certainly the measuring device would be important.

The respondents often sat under a tree, both alone or in groups, conversing and drinking (mainly) traditional beer. The researcher sat and joined in the conversation to minimize the social distance between the researcher and the respondents; this was a way of asking for acceptance from the groups.

Because the meetings were not pre-arranged, the researcher drove around in the villages looking for homes with traditional murals. The researcher had first to be accepted before joining groups or

speaking to individuals. The researcher visited the interviewees in their different meeting places, sometimes where they gathered under a tree to relax. The researcher was sometimes offered a drink as a welcome to the group gesture. As the researcher is familiar with the culture and traditions, he knew that drinking with the locals is a gesture of respect and a sign that he wanted to be part of the community. The researcher knelt and pretended to drink, then apologised that as he is on duty, he may not take more alcohol.

The conversation about the meanings of the murals, signs, shapes, symbols, and colours used on the walls of their homes continued. The respondents were questioned about their oral traditions and traditional beliefs and how these manifested into an expressive visual language on the decorated walls. Unfortunately, in some cases the wall decorations were badly damaged by seasonal rains, as natural earth colours and cow dung were used as paint. These organic materials are easily washed away by rain, scorched by the sun, or damaged by wind.

The researcher chose the wrong time of the year to visit the murals, which are done according to the change of seasons. The researcher apologised and explained that this was the only time of the year that he was able to visit the villages.

3.5 Sampling

As there were only few elders still alive to be available for the interview, no particular number of participants were targeted and registered. Fifty-six homes were sampled and 120 pictures of the participants and the murals were taken. Nevertheless, as mentioned in the problem statement, useful responses were gathered despite the small number of participants. While some information on the topic was merely fabrication and Western influences were evident, some responses were useful as they were connected to African knowledge and wisdom.

As already mentioned, most traditional murals that contained communicative expressive language had faded, and only a few homes were still built as traditional huts with the *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (flowers or calabash/gourd) and *maguva* (walls around the courtyard). Some of the elderly participants had to be probed for them to remember why the signs and symbols were applied on the walls of their huts and on the walls of their neighbours' huts. About 200

elderly women, some spectators, and about 20 men were interviewed. Although the focus of the research was not on men, they assisted where necessary.

Two non-probability purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques were employed in the sampling processes, and a guided list of questions were discussed to collect data. The researcher was unable to sample and test the representativeness and gender, as the focus was on a small number of elderly women who knew about the oral traditions and mural painting. The male respondents were not good candidates, as they do not decorate murals; however, they helped in probing and reminding the elderly women of useful information.

Purposive and snowball techniques complement each other. Participant with knowledge were handpicked and interviewed to get the relevant information. They were asked if they knew of any other participants with relevant information. The snowball sampling technique was suitable, as it led to participants in one village giving names of possible participants living in the next village. Hence, the setting of this study was at the villages that were the stronghold of the culture and traditions of the three linguistic groups. Participants were sampled individually or in groups based on their knowledge and skills of oral tradition and traditional beliefs as it related to their mural painting. Statistics as a method to measure the response of the participants were not used in this study because the population with traditional knowledge was very small.

Sampling was conducted in a relaxed manner; language was not a barrier as the researcher also speaks the language of the Balobedu and the Vhavenda. Some of the symbols painted on the walls of the Vatsonga and the myths connected to their beliefs were not alien to the Balobedu and the Vhavenda. Some symbols on the Vhavenda and Balobedu murals were similar to those of the Vatsonga murals and had the same meanings. These three linguistic groups influenced each other in many ways, including their oral traditions and traditional beliefs that affect their expressive narrative communication through traditional murals with symbols that appear to be decorative.

3.6 Reporting

3.6.1 Introduction

The traditional wall decorations of the three linguistic groups under investigation namely the Balobedu, Vatsonga and Vhavenda in Limpopo Province is fast dying out.

This investigation aimed to establish if any meaning is contained in the traditional murals, i.e. what message is contained in this visual expressive language of pictography, iconography, simplified and stylised depiction of basic geometric shapes, symbols, represented in multi-coloured dimensional patterns.

The urbanization and westernization of communities are the main causes for the diminishing traditional murals. Most of the homes that bear the history of this ancient language, using pictography to depict the oral and traditional beliefs, no longer exist or are dilapidated. Before this expressive visual language of pictography, geometric shapes, symbols, and signs disappear, there is a need to collect, document and record the last practitioners and the keepers of African indigenous knowledge embedded in the oral traditions and traditional beliefs to help decode the meaning, if any, behind the pictographs on these homes.

Qualitative research methods, observations and interviews were employed to collect data, and the participants were sampled to test the collected information. The hypothesis was tested and the findings are that the messages encoded through geometric shapes and symbols, represented in multi-coloured dimensional patterns, were not mere decorations but a readable text that is interpreted as oral traditions and beliefs.

3.6.2 Literature review

Previous studies conducted on South African traditional murals concluded that the imagery of pictography on the decorated walls in Limpopo Province were purely for decorative purposes and served no deeper meaning, e.g. Vogel (1983), Matthews and Changuion (1989), and Schneider (1986). Their findings are silent on the symbolic language embedded in the wall decorations, i.e. the meanings of symbols which may be attached to various African traditions and constitute a language. In this

regard, it is assumed that no authorities have yet searched, recorded or analysed the significance of the pictography and iconography of South African wall decorations.

3.6.3 Methodology

The qualitative approach, qualitative interviews, and questionnaire were employed to collect data. The research was also conducted in the Balobedu, Vhavenda, Vatsonga villages where these linguistic groups are not mixed. The researcher interacted with the people by observing, participating, and recording everything related to the study that was happening in their environment.

The quantitative research method was applied where the researcher required accurate measurements, explanations and descriptions of events. However, to get valid and concrete information, the researcher participated wherever possible with the participants and led the discussions and debates objectively. The researcher was well prepared because he knew the traditions and beliefs of the Vatsonga. The questions asked were clear and open-ended to allow the participants to cover a vast area of knowledge. The researcher established whom the custodians of indigenous knowledge, wisdom, oral traditions and traditional beliefs were regarding the wall decorations. A guide list was presented to the participants and because most of the participants were illiterate, the questions were read aloud and translated before recording the interviews. An attempt was made to collect as many recordings as possible of the interviews in the different areas. Therefore, the open-ended and close-ended questions focused on factors such as the use of linguistic devices, visuals, imagery and symbols used, if any. A formal analysis was made of each interview and a comparison was drawn to compare the meanings and interpretations of oral traditions and traditional beliefs, symbols, and geometric symbols on the decorated walls as they relate to the visual expressive language.

3.6.4 Qualitative questioning

In many cases, the unstructured interview, also known as the in-depth or open-ended interview, was used to get the information. Moderators need to be skilled in asking questions. The researcher did not use a set questionnaire to find out information, as it was more appropriate to use a topic guide, i.e. a list of ideas, footnotes, terminology, etc. used during the interview to help obtain valid and reliable data.

3.6.5 Case study

The case study research method that was used to study a group of people in their settlements in Limpopo Province was the most flexible of all research designs as it allowed the researcher to retain the general social science event of the people under investigation through empirical events.

In the villages, the researcher observed, consulted and interacted with young and older women, older men, and the keepers of traditional knowledge and wisdom. Interviews took place in the homes where older women gathered to have alcoholic drinks, in the homes of individuals, in the street, and at the bus stop and taxi ranks. The researcher collected symbols, signs and images of oral traditions and beliefs from the decorated walls known as *maguva* (walls around the courtyard). The interviewees were shown the pictures of decorated walls that the researcher took on previous visits to the villages.

In this investigation, the researcher applied observational research with a low environmental structure to gather information. This low structured rating technique allowed the researcher to examine and observe the subjects in their day-to-day activities, whether cultural or social. The researcher sometimes took an active role as a member of the group, and in other instances, was only an observer.

3.6.6 Survey method

The survey method was used when a response from a larger population was sampled, individual respondents and groups represented the bigger population.

3.6.7 Data collection

The main data-collection occurred mostly in the Vatsonga settlements. As already mentioned it was comfortable to discuss issues around symbols, marriage, death, taboos, and oral traditions and beliefs. In the villages where the participants were mainly Balobedu or Vhavenda, respondents who could speak Xitsonga were interviewed. Their responses on the topic, explanations, and meanings of their symbols and signs in their design patterns had similar meanings as that of the Vatsonga who had already been interviewed about the murals.

The data-collecting tool was written in English but because most of the respondents could not read or write in English, the researcher had to translate the questions into Xitsonga and read them aloud. Where the respondents could still not understand, the researcher had to elaborate in their language for clarity.

3.6.8 Sampling

When sampling two non-probabilities, purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques were employed in the sampling of the participants. As mentioned previously, only a few traditional huts with faded decorations *mabilomu/swiluva swa swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers) and *maguva* (walls around the courtyard) remained. Some of the elderly participants had to be probed to remember why the symbols were applied on the walls of their huts and on the walls surrounding their homes.

The guided list of questions to collect data and for sampling was unfeasible to sample and test the representativeness and gender, as the focus was on a small group of elderly women who knew about the oral traditions, traditional beliefs and mural painting. Male respondents were not good candidates, as they do not usually decorate the walls, however they helped to probe and remind the elderly women of certain information. Nevertheless, in the Botludi village, Mr Nkuna showed a *maguva* (wall around the courtyard) that he had painted himself (cf. figure 31) and Mr James Baloyi (the informant) showed the painted walls at his home in the N'wajaheni village (cf. figure 29), but did not reveal who the artist was.

As there were only a few elders, the findings could not represent the population. Additional problems were that:

- the elders blamed rural development for demolishing the traditional huts and replacing them with Western, contemporary architecture, thus causing the moral decay amongst their people
- culture is negated amongst the Vatsonga; the ancient teachings are forgotten
- the participants had forgotten the symbolic meaning of their decorations, and how to interpret them according to their oral traditions and beliefs.

3.6.9 Summary

The qualitative research method was appropriate for this study as it pertains to social science research. This research design method was used as a tool to help the researcher in the organization of his field

plan. The research methods guided the researcher to measure the findings through data collection and analysis. The respondents were observed whilst interacting with them. Open-ended questions were asked, recordings were made of the interviews, and photographs and videos were taken of the traditional murals. Pictography with iconography of symbols, signs, colours and meanings were decoded by linking the oral traditions and traditional beliefs to the images portrayed on the walls.

3.6.10 Findings

The findings tested the hypothesis. Consequently, the assumption that traditional murals that bear basic geometric shapes, pictographs, symbols, signs arranged in decorative patterns, and colours, carried what the researcher suspected hypothetically, i.e. they were ancient African texts in the form of pictography used as an expressive visual communicative language. This language was used in traditional ceremonies, rituals and customs to teach African knowledge and wisdom to the villagers according to their age and the type of message.

3.6.11 Discussion

As already mentioned, many academics researched and argued that traditional murals had no meaning, i.e. they were purely for decorative purposes. The researcher pointed out that Africans do not share secretive information to strangers and the uninitiated (cf. page 47). Therefore, the academics who tried to find out the meanings of traditional murals may not have been told everything about the oral traditions and traditional beliefs that were embedded in the pictographs represented in visual images (geometric shapes, symbols, and signs).

3.7 Conclusion

The researcher identified that the symbolic visual expressive language in the form of pictographs is a communicative language used on the walls of the traditional homes of the three linguistic groups in the rural villages in Limpopo Province. Previous academics are silent about these arguments as they simply saw the wall decorations as a way of beautifying homes. For further study, the researcher recommends that only people who have a good understanding of African knowledge and wisdom should decode the symbols and signs used on the walls, pottery, and sculptures.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the general overview of the results and contextualization of the Vatsonga, Vhavenda and Balobedu's traditional murals with pictography and iconography, i.e. symbols and signs, depicting oral traditions and beliefs, obtained through the qualitative research method are explained.

The results confirmed the hypothesis, which suggested that the pictography on the traditional murals by the Vatsonga is a language that communicates meanings through visual expressive images that constitute a language. Fifty-six homes with narrative visual images of pictography with iconography that carried meanings related to the research were selected and observed. Participants were sampled, and data recorded from one-on-one or group interviews. Photographs and videos of the traditional walls were used as a visual aid to assist the participants during the information collection processes to help yield the results that informed the research methods. In addition, 120 pictures of participants explaining the meanings attached to the traditional murals were recorded.

Owusu (1998:7) argues that,

For westerners, the African Continent, with its rich symbolism, is still very difficult to understand. The over five and a half thousand tribes (which can be divided into several hundred language groups) all have their own rites, myths, and symbols. Africans, themselves, recognize only the meanings of the sculptures and signs of their own tribe. Many objects are unintelligible even for members of the tribe, if they are not members of one of the secret societies. Since, as part of magical ceremonies, many symbols are kept strictly secret, an exact interpretation is often very difficult to obtain or entirely impossible.

The problem statement of this research supports that African symbols and signs had communicative meanings that were understood by certain people in the community.

The designs on some of the traditional murals under investigations showed other influences, i.e. Arabic religious design patterns and Christian symbols. Hence, while some responses were useful, as the

guardians and keepers of tradition kept them connected to African iconography, symbols and signs of African knowledge and wisdom, some were merely fabrications, as the original purpose for the traditional murals were forgotten or had completely died out.

These results obtained through the qualitative method, which included observation and case studies, were not based on statistics, as there were only a few participants due to the reasons already mentioned. Observation and case studies were further used to gather, test, and synthesize the information. The impact and role of traditional murals (wall decorations), oral traditions and traditional beliefs were determined by the results collected. The explanations, decoding, documenting, and recordings of the events as told by the respondents, gave rise to the understanding of pictography with iconography, symbols, and signs as a visual expressive language. The interpretation of the visual images on the traditional murals likely gave historical information that is no longer available. However, some of the events were realised, as the researcher recorded several of the meanings, which were decoded and explained by the participants during the interviews.

These results were recorded using social science research action where the researcher interacted with the participants to gather data of their behaviour during the session. The researcher observed, recorded, and sampled the participants to obtain results on their behaviour during their everyday nature as it transpired.

4.2 Results on observation

The people's behaviour in their natural habitat informed the outcome of this research, i.e. the meanings on the iconography, symbols and signs depicted as graphical design patterns on the walls of the living space of the Vatsonga and their neighbours (the Balobedu and Vhavenda) were observed, translated, interpreted, and recorded. This process was made possible through the observational method.

Although the observation processes were focused on the Vatsonga, the Balobedu and the Vhavenda who were living amongst the Vatsonga were also interviewed in their communities. The results of the observed activities were collected in the settlements of the Balobedu in the Modjadji area; the Sethagoni, Botludi, Madibeng, Motupa, Muruji, Skhimini, Ga-Koranta; Vatsonga in Malamulele; the Mphambo, Giyani Hanyani-Thomo, Ngove, Elim, and Mbhokota in the Tzaneen area; the N'wamitwa,

Babanana, and N'wajaheni, in the Venda, Elim, Thohoyandou, Louis Tredgardt, Khubvi, Vuwani and Njelele villages.

4.2.1 How the three linguistic groups influenced one another

During the gathering and testing of the results, the observational strategy helped the researcher realise that these three linguistic groups were closely knitted together. There were significant overlaps in their social beliefs and cultural practices through marriage and other communal factors. The traditional Vatsonga murals were observed in the Giyani area, from Hosi Gija-Ngove, Hanyani-Thomo, and Mavambe to the Mbhokota Village near Elim. The results showed evidence that the Vhavenda and Balobedu influenced the Vatsonga and vice versa. Historically, the first occupants of this area were the Vhavenda, followed by the Balobedu. The Vatsonga were the last group of people to settle in the area. They learned, shared, and borrowed some symbols and signs from their neighbours who had settled in the area, i.e. cultural symbols and signs were exchanged in their communities, villages, and settlements.

4.2.2 Layout designs of the homes

The researcher observed that the layout design of the homes in the settlements of the three linguistic groups had a significant symbolic meaning to the communities. There was a hut for the head of the family, and a hut for each of his wives. The ground plan, arrangement of the huts, and architecture of both linguistic groups were similar in design. Some of the traditional huts had a *xitsumba/xigurumbana/xitanga* (kitchen) depending on the dialect, and a cattle kraal. The huts were connected by *maguva* (walls around the courtyard) with an entrance facing the main gate. The floor was made from cow dung, and black earth was used as a bonding material. The floor was smoothed with decorative patterns (figures 1-6), which the Balobedu, Vhavenda, and Vatsonga from Giyani, Malamulele and Elim call *makholo* (patterns). The whole process was called *Ku sindza hi vulongo bya tihomu* (making patterned floor decorations with cow dung). A smooth pebble from a river was used to polish the cow dung floor in the courtyard.

Since 1994, when a democratic government was elected in South Africa and the blacks received economic empowerment, the Vatsonga have been building contemporary houses, often with a double or single garage and a beautiful fence.

4.2.3 *Maguva* (walls around the courtyard) *ya Vatsonga*

The word *maguva* (walls surrounding the courtyard) (figures 8-9) is commonly used by the Balobedu, Vhavenda, and Vatsonga from Giyani, Malamulele and Elim. The Vatsonga in N'wamitwa, Hosi Muhlava area call the walls, *mikhubyana* or *mimbudzana* (walls surrounding the courtyard). These names are borrowed from the Kelobedu language, *mokhupsane*.

It was further noticed that participants living in the Mbhokota and Hanyani-Thomo villages had very colourful traditional murals. They mostly used different shades of blues, greens, and purples, while reds, yellows and orange were used sparingly, as they symbolise danger or blood. Brown and ochre symbolises Mother Earth. Green and blue anthropomorphic shapes with long stems with one or two leaves at the end were common designs in the targeted villages. Checkerboard designs (figures 8-9) known as *mrab'arab'a* (game) were observed. The researcher could not establish the meaning of the checkerboards. The participants said that these simplified, graphic designs or patterns were that, this style is part of the *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (calabash, gourd flowers). The symmetrical shapes are known as *swiapulana* (small apples) (figures 12-15), and *maphaphatana* (butterflies). These graphics were observed on the walls of the three linguistic groups.

The Vatsonga traditional walls were covered with *mavala ya nghotsa* (designs and patterns) that were mainly repeated half circles (figures 26-35). The symbolic meaning gathered from the respondents was that the *maphapha* (calabashes/gourd), the plant that feeds the people, represents a woman as carer and life giver. It bears heart-shaped green leaves and yellow flowers that develop into a calabash/gourd, (figures 10-11). Even though the explanations seemed not to make much sense, the researcher picked on some symbolic connotations related to the gourds calabash, as it was translated into the main symbol that carried the customs, oral traditions and traditional beliefs (figures 16, 18). The shape of the gourd is associated with the shape of a woman, a smaller rounded shape for the upper body and the bigger shape of the bottom part for the lower body. When mature, it develops seeds that germinate and grow into a climbing or trailing plant that bears gourds. Symbolically, it is like a woman who carries an embryo that grows into a human being.

The keepers of traditions and knowledge used a gourd in the baby making ritual as a charm to help a young woman conceive. They would use a gourd to make a *mbvule* (doll) and dress it like a baby; the girl would carry doll on her back at all times and play with it like a real baby (figures 16&17). The hollowed out gourd was also used to store strong medicine and was known as *nhunguvana* (small calabash/gourd used to keep medicine). In the initiation ceremonies for girls, the handle of a calabash was used as a phallic object. No further information was disclosed, as this was kept secret to the uninitiated and had to be respected (figure 19). The calabash/gourd plant is also used in Xitsonga idioms, e.g. *wanuna wa nava ku fana ni n'hwembe* (a man can stretch like a gourd plant and have multiple lovers).

4.2.4 Symbolic meaning of colours and shapes

The traditional murals of the previously mentioned linguistic groups had colourful bands painted around the huts. The walls were painted in white, green, or blue (figure 42-43). At the bottom of the wall, they would paint two or three bands in different colours called *ku tsema* (painted coloured band around the hut), depending on the mood of the person working on the mural. The respondents attached different meanings to the colours and their symbolic meanings. For instance, black and dark blue were associated with darkness, i.e. black is a colour for death and some people wear dark blue when grieving. The meanings given to colours were inconsistent, sometimes red, purple, and yellow were associated with rebirth or the tinge when the sun rose or set. Green and blue were symbolic of spring.

Different coloured bands were evident on the walls of the homes of all three of the linguistic groups, all had similar interpretations (figures 26-35), and all used similar patterns, colours, geometric shapes, symbols, and signs on their traditional murals.

Owusu (1998:281) noted that the zigzag patterns used by the Vhavenda symbolise a python as a link to the ancestors, and that a Vhavenda prince preferred to be called a crocodile. The Vhavenda painted triangles or diamond shapes repeatedly on the walls of their huts, using different colours, to protect themselves from crocodile attacks. The triangles and diamonds symbolised teeth and the marking on the back of a crocodile (figure 20).

While some of the Vatsonga are Christians, some still believe in ancestral worship and have a shrine in the courtyards of their homes to venerate their ancestors (figure 25). Some of the Balobedu and Vhavenda, who settled amongst the Vatsonga, have the same traditional beliefs, which shows that the three linguistic groups influenced each other.

4.3 Case study

As already mentioned, the Vatsonga ethnic groups are a small percentage of the South African population. Not all the Vatsonga in the nine South African provinces were included in this case study; only the Vatsonga living in areas believed to be the Vatsonga stronghold were targeted. The results collected from the Vatsonga were compared to the responses from the other two linguistic groups. The researcher was aware of the mutual influences amongst the linguistic groups and the copying of their neighbours cultures and linguistic devices. Therefore, the flexible research method was used, as the researcher, with his background of traditions, beliefs, knowledge and wisdom of the target linguistic groups, could participate as an observer and listener whilst leading and probing the participants to help them remember information that they could possibly have forgotten. This assisted in the comparison of the responses collected from the linguistic groups that are mixed with the Vatsonga.

4.3.1 Three linguistic groups in the rural parts of Limpopo Province

The Vatsonga under examination lived in the villages in the north eastern part of Limpopo Province. Some of the villagers lived with their neighbours, the Balobedu and the Vhavenda. The three linguistic communities were predominantly rural and possibly still practised various traditional beliefs. The traditional murals of the Balobedu and the Vhavenda, who lived a far distance from the Vatsonga, differed from the others. However, the Balobedu and the Vhavenda murals were similar.

4.3.2 Comparison of key symbols from oral tradition and traditional beliefs

During this qualitative research fieldwork, a case study was conducted by comparing the symbols, signs, interpretation, and meaning of key symbols, signs, and narratives from the oral traditions and traditional beliefs. Data were collected from the participants from the three linguistic groups, and information was crosschecked, compared, and drawn against the information provided to find out if any meanings were attached to the traditional murals that seemed similar. The feedback on the results sourced from the respondents were of the key symbols, signs, and narratives from the oral traditions

and traditional beliefs, e.g. paintings on the walls of the Vatsonga traditional homes. In this case, the case study indicated that the symbols and signs of their shapes, designs, use of colours, and pattern making had similar meanings.

A case was presented in the form of questions as to whether what is on the walls were decorations. Some respondents mentioned that, the *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers) were not for a decorative purpose but were messages to the community members. However, with the change of time, the mixing of cultures, and influences from non-Africans, the reason for making the *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers) wall decorations took second place to the concepts of tourism and modernisation causing the paintings to become purely decorative. That is why most people today think that African traditional murals are purely for decorative purposes.

4.3.3 Information from individuals and groups of participants

The results were collected from individuals and groups of elderly women, some of whom still perpetuate the painting of *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers) for their traditional meaning. Some of these skilled practitioners and carriers of knowledge and wisdom could explain the meanings of the symbols and signs on the walls of their homes. Therefore, these three linguistic groups, like other African tribes, communicated their African knowledge and wisdom through a visual expressive language that uses iconography, symbolism and signs.

A comparison of these visual devices indicated that the iconography across the Vatsonga tribal authorities and clans was very similar. Therefore, the Vatsonga could not have used their own symbols and signs without borrowing from their neighbours and exchanging tribal iconography. The people examined in this case study painted everyday activities and objects as symbols and signs, to convey meaning. Furthermore, these paintings were subjected to strict rites with profound symbolic, religious, and magical meaning derived from the tribes' worldview.

4.3.4 Personal and secret symbolism

The symbols and signs (figures 26-27) were imprinted on the bodies as scarification and tattoos of the same tribe, e.g. stylised drawings of *mabilomu/swiluva xa xiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers) composed of tri-angles arranged to symbolise a flower (figure 25-26).

Since the meaning behind these symbols and signs was personal and secret, the meanings were not disclosed indiscriminately; only the initiated understood the meaning behind the symbolism. Different tattooed patterns on men or women symbolised the social standing of that person in his/her community. The uninitiated were confused, and concluded that they were for beautification only. Some of the results collected were traditional symbols and stylised geometric shapes based on oral traditions related to animal folklore, nature, the universe and celestial and ancestral beliefs.

4.3.5 Vatsonga's beliefs in folklore and the celestial world

The case study was employed to analyse what the Vatsonga knew and believed about the celestial world in their folklore. Junod (1927:302-306) argues that the Vatsonga believed in the creation myth and used stars and the moon to navigate the ploughing and planting seasons. They believed that the celestial was an immense solid vault, which rested on earth. The *tilo* (heavens, stars, and moon were associated with women). Stylised full and half circles with radiating lines symbolised the sun. Short lines crossing each other symbolised a star, and crescent shapes represented the moon in all its phases (figure 36).

4.3.6 Creation myth as it is narrated by the three linguistic groups, the significance of oral tradition, traditional beliefs, signs and symbolism incorporated into the homes within the three linguistic groups in Limpopo Province

All three linguistic groups believed the same myths of how man originated and how the universe was created, and depicted these myths like a storyboard using a very simple, stylised technique and style to depict the animals, humans, and nature.

During the interviews, the participants were asked to share what they knew about the secret information on the symbols and signs. The observer noticed that the respondents did not like to talk about the origin of humankind because it involved death, taboos, circumcision, and rituals of rites of passage. For instance, the answers to the questions "Where do human beings come from and how did Africans respond to death?" hinted on the belief that humans come from reeds or from a cave somewhere faraway. Sometimes the participant would respond using idioms or proverbs. Death was associated with witches who were depicted by simplified geometric shapes and patterns found on the skins of

lizards and chameleons, and on tortoise shells. These animals were believed to have been sent by the creator to pass on the message of life and death to the people. The lizard was believed to have overheard the message that someone would die (depending on the myth).

The diamond shapes with repeated designs, and the half triangles on the skin of a lizard, tortoise or chameleon, were copied and painted on the walls as a protection charm. Some participants indicated that when they were young, their parents used to make reliefs of lizards, tortoises, and chameleons on the walls as a charm to protect their homes against sorcery and lightning. They were taught that when they see a chameleon, they must put tobacco snuff in its mouth to kill and burn it. If they did not do that, each bone from the chameleon would grow into a new baby chameleon.

This practice is also evident on the traditional wall decorations of the people in Burkino Faso, who still practice this ancient means of communication, i.e. making patterns and animal reliefs on their decorated walls. The Vatsonga believe that for a traditional hut to protect them against the elements when we go inside to sleep, it had to be protected by applying repetitive patterns to frighten the evil ones, and chase away witchcraft and bad omens.

4.3.7 *Maguva* (walls around the courtyard) for educational purpose

The respondents commented that the traditional mural paintings were a way of teaching the young ones and of passing down the skills and knowledge from one generation to the next. A bride's mural painting skill was tested before agreeing on the *ndzovolo* (dowry).

4.4 Results on survey

The survey method was used to collect information from individuals and larger groups mainly in the Vatsonga communities, but to a lesser extent, also from the Balobedu and Vhavenda in Limpopo Province. The response of the survey population represents the bigger population of the linguistic groups under investigation. This method is used for investigative and illustrative purposes.

All the participants who responded were over 40 years of age. They were all familiar with traditional murals and their symbolic meanings, as they were practitioners of mural painting. From their

narrations, it was observed that the three linguistic groups had similar oral traditions and traditional beliefs.

4.4.1 Meaning of bands around the Vhavenda clay pots

Mr Meshack Raphalalani Luvimbi and Mr Avashoni Manganyi, the local sculptors and keepers of oral tradition and traditional beliefs in the Thohoyandou area, are well known and respected for their knowledge in Thohoyandou. They told the researcher a myth that explains why there are colourful bands around the clay pots and indicated that the coloured bands on the clay pots that the Vhavenda make have a significant meaning. During their journey from Vambezi near the Zambezi River, the ancestors of the Vhavenda traded in Mapungubwe, Dzata, and Monomotapa, where the Zimbabwe ruins are today, before sailing the Zambezi and Limpopo rivers to the Indian Ocean. This journey is commemorated and symbolised on their clay pots.

The band, painted in any colour, around the clay pots symbolised the horizon over the ocean, and the triangles symbolised crocodile teeth in this case. It must be noted that a symbol or sign had many meanings depending on the narrative that was being portrayed.

4.4.2 Testing the knowledge of symbols in the visual expressive language

The researcher used a survey to establish how the myths, symbols, signs, and beliefs become a visual expressive language.

The participants explained the traditional *ndzovolo* (dowry) ceremony. Preparations for the ceremony included a traditional game of tricking the groom's entourage without their knowledge. The courtyard floor was covered with cow dung and patterned with zigzag, half circles, straight and crossed lines, and waves to form stylised mountains, rivers, and streets. When the visitors walked through the courtyard to the hut prepared for the *ndzovolo* (dowry) ceremony, they had to walk on the imagined streets drawn on the floor. If a member of the group stepped on the sides of the street, the whole group would have to pay a fine (figure 40). In some cases, the bride was given cow dung to demonstrate her skill in preparing a courtyard floor to her in-laws (figure 42). This was a way the future in-laws could measure how skilled a young woman was.

4.4.3 Meaning of colours, symbols and signs encoded on the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard)

The survey revealed the meaning of the symbols and signs encoded by bands of colours on the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard). It was not a rule of thumb for colours to have the same symbolism for all the linguistic groups. However, some participants remembered the meaning of certain colours, e.g. black around an old man's hut indicated that he was not sexually active anymore. A red band was a warning to a man that his wife was menstruating and that he was not to visit her house until her hut was painted white again (figure 43). The symbolic meaning of the oval traditional huts was that a hut was like a womb and the man sleeping inside the hut was like an embryo. The wooden pinnacle on the grass-thatched roof was a phallic symbol and the grass symbolised pubic hair (figure 22). The *xitiko* (circular fireplace), in the centre of a hut was aligned with the roof pinnacle to symbolise the intercourse between the male and female (figure 23). This information was not written in books, but was kept alive on the living spaces of the three linguistic groups. However, this knowledge and wisdom of the Africans is fast dying out.

4.5 Summary

In this chapter, the hypothesis was tested and the results confirmed the problem statement, i.e. that the pictography and iconography with symbols, signs, and colours applied on the walls of the traditional huts of the Vatsonga were ancient African texts used as a visual expressive language communicated through visual images in the form of what was perceived as design patterns by the uninitiated.

This language was employed on the walls of their living spaces and engraved in the ceremonial objects used in the traditional rituals, rites of passage, birth, death, and marriage ceremonies as protection against evil activities in the village. They were also used to teach the African knowledge and wisdom to young and old, depending on the message.

CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to analyse the data collected from the Vatsonga respondents, i.e. the symbolic expressive visual language depicted as *mavala ya nghotsa* (designs and patterns) on the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard), *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers), *ku sindza hi makholo* (making patterned floor decorations with cow dung), and *ku tsema* (coloured bands around the hut). The analysed data responded to questions posed by the hypothesis and problem statement. A standardised questionnaire was employed to collect this information. Data from this observation method was collected using the qualitative method to assist the participants to interpret and translate the visual images, and analysed. These images are composed of pictography with iconography with symbols, signs of one-dimensional designs patterns made of lines, and geometric shapes.

This data analysis is based on the information presented by the participants during the scientific action research conducted by the researcher. The data revealed that those who painted the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard), *mavala ya nghotsa* (design patterns), *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers), *ku sindza hi makholo* (making patterned floor decorations with cow dung) and *ku tsema* (coloured bands around the hut) did not receive any formal education on how to express this symbolic visual language. The technique was passed on from mother to daughter or by the community (figure1). It is believed that some practitioners painted with the intention to communicate, whilst others painted to beautify their homes. The painting of the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard) and *mabilomu/swiluva swa swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers) was done consciously, but the symbols and signs are arranged subconsciously. Therefore, on some of the walls one can read a message, whilst others are just aesthetically pleasing. Since all the painters used the same technique, style, colours, and iconography, the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard) may express a meaning that was intended consciously or unconsciously, e.g. white symbolises purity and black symbolises darkness. Alternatively, a practitioner may intend to express a message but the message does not communicate what was planned. In addition, the symbolic meanings of the colours applied on the walls may have different expressions depending on the painter. Some colours have lost their original meanings because of the influence from neighbours and some people may give different meanings to

the same colour. However, the respondents gave either their personal interpretations of the pictography or no significant meaning to it. The names and meanings given to the shapes and colours on the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard), *mavala ya nghotsa* (design patterns), *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (flower of calabash/gourd), *ku sindza hi makholo* (making patterned floor decorations with cow dung) and *ku tsema* (coloured bands around the hut) were translated from Xitsonga into English to assist with the data analyses. The analysed data helped the researcher to understand the Vatsonga expressive visual language of pictography with iconography, symbols and signs.

5.2 Data analysis on observation method

The observation method on the analysed data provided new information on the previously researched oral traditions and traditional beliefs embedded in the symbolic visual expressive language that is composed of iconography, symbols, and signs, which was hitherto regarded as simple and naïve wall decorations without meaning. However, the data delivered by the participants who were elders and custodians of African knowledge and wisdom, provided new information on how to translate and interpret this disappearing and dying symbolic expressive language.

The analysed data informed the research that the simplified style of one-dimensional drawings, occasionally composed of triangles, diamonds, arcs, circles, and half circles, had a whole range of meanings. These signs and symbols represented the cosmos, nature, animals, and superstitions, e.g. the *bilomu/xiluva xa swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers) that develop into a calabash/gourd (cf. figure 10-11), which was the most prominent plant used on the Vatsonga traditional murals.

In answer to questions from the standardised questionnaire about the symbols associated with the Vatsonga (cf. question 18-19), the respondents explained that a calabash is associated with a woman. The shape of a gourd that is used to store strong medicine *nhunguvana* (small calabash used to keep medicine) is compared to the shape of a woman (figure 11). The *bilomu/xiluva* (flower) and a *xikhomo xa ndzheko* (calabash handle) are regarded as phallic symbols (cf. figure 19). To people who do not understand the secret language behind the iconography, symbols, and signs, the colourful stylised abstract shapes are assumed to be mere repetitive patterns of geometric shapes that have no meanings. Yet, when the respondents explained what the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard), *mavala ya nghotsa* (design patterns), *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers), *ku sindza hi*

makholo (making patterned floor decorations with cow dung), and *ku tsema* (coloured bands around the hut) represented, new information was exposed.

These colourful repeated triangular shapes sometimes signified mountains, and in some cases crocodile teeth. The recurring semi-circles that form arcs are interpreted as *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers). The uninitiated simply ignored the symbolic meanings attached to the primary and ochre colours and interpreted them as decorative colours. The symbolic meanings encoded to the interpretations attached to the bands of different colours painted around the hut were regarded as having no significant meanings. However, the analysed data from the respondents on the above-mentioned information exposed the fact that the colours, shapes, and colourful bands painted on the homes of the Vatsonga have significant meanings.

The data analysed revealed that the *kusindza hi makholo* (making patterned floor decorations with cow dung), i.e. zigzags, semi-circles, stretched circles, long and short wavy lines, signified abstract landscapes with rivers, streets, mountains, and clouds.

5.2.1 Maguva (walls around the courtyard) and makhumbi (walls of huts)

The *maguva* (walls around the courtyard) are built and decorated by women using a mixture of water and soil to make mud bricks. The walls are built between the huts to join them, are normally about a metre high, with the main entrance facing the street. The women painted various colourful patterns on the walls. The Balobedu, Vhavenda, and Vatsonga from Giyani, Malamulele and Elim (figures 8-9) commonly use the word "*maguva*" (walls around the courtyard) indicating their influence on each other. The Vatsonga in KaN'wa-mitwa, and Ka Hosi Muhlava call the wall *mikhubyana* or *mimbudzana*. The analysed data also revealed that the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard) in the Mbhokota and Hanyani-Thomo Villages, are painted in various vibrant colours.

5.2.2 Images of maguva (walls around the courtyard) and mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana (calabash/gourd flowers)

A wall from the Hanyani-Thomo Village painted by Mrs Mbulayeni and a wall from the Njelele Village painted by Mrs Dedeya Ngoveni, both had anthropomorphic drawings of

mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana (calabash/gourd flowers) (figure 49) or *swiapulana* (baby apples), as they are sometimes called (figure 14-15 and 49). Both walls depicted *vana va xiphaswana* (baby gourds) to depict the Vatsonga figure of speech: *wanuna wa nava ku fana na xiphaswa* (a man can have multiple lovers to extend his family) (figure 15).

According to the respondents, the *maphapha* (calabashes/gourds) is a plant that feeds the people, bears heart-shaped green leaves and yellow flowers, and, like a pumpkin, extends itself (figures 10-11). In this sense, it represents a woman and her responsibilities as carer and life giver.

The bottom quarter of the wall has recurring tri-angles symbolising the *tintshava* (mountains). In this composition, the practitioner used pink, blues, greens, and purples (cold colours). Shades of ochre were used sparingly as the symbol of Mother Earth's blood (warm colours). Anthropomorphic shapes painted in green and blue, with long stems and one or two leaves at the end are common designs in the target villages (figure 15 and 49). The Vatsonga traditional walls were covered with *mavala ya nghotsa* (designs and patterns).

5.2.3 Stylised image of *mrab'arab'a* (game) on the *maguva* (wall around the courtyard)

Kokwana Makaringe from the Mbhokota village painted the *mrab'arab'a* (game), which is similar to a checkerboard game. The reason for painting this game is unclear, as people say it is a game played in the mines as an assessment tool to qualify for employment (figure 8-9). The *mrab'arab'a* (game) is a sophisticated, one-dimensional design of triangles and squares arranged to look like the game of checkers. The respondents explained that these simplified, graphic patterns form part of the *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphawsana* (calabash/gourd flowers) *ya maphapha* (calabashes/gourds) when decorated with *mavala ya nghotsa* (designs and patterns) similar to those painted on the *phaphana* (calabash/gourd), (figure 44). The colourful designs and patterns on the Vatsonga clay pots are mainly repeated half circles, triangles and diamond shapes (figures 26-35).

5.2.4 Image of *phaphatana* (butterfly) on the *guva* (wall around the courtyard)

Dedeya Ngoveni from the Hanyani-Thomo Village painted a one-dimensional drawing of a black *phaphatana* (butterfly) against a blue background (figure 13). It is composed of four circles, a triangle at the bottom, and two lines for the antenna on top.

Mrs Maria Mhlongo from the Babanana Village painted a one-dimensional painting of a red and white butterfly against an ochre background (figure 12) on her wall. It is composed of two tri-angles facing each other to represent wings, two white heart shapes make a body, and on both sides of the wings, are two oval shapes that look like eyes.

5.2.5 Image of *xiluva xa xiphaswana* (flower of calabash/gourd) on the *guva* (wall around the courtyard)

Mamulatela Letswalo from the Botludi Village painted seven different panels on the wall; each panel tells a different story. On the first panel on the right is a one-dimensional design of ochre *bilomu/xiluva xa xiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers) with a leaf on the stems against the black background (figure 30). The second panel has two white symmetrical semi-circles on the bottom and top of the frame. The third panel is composed of black triangles against an ochre background. The fourth has black triangles facing a diamond shape in the centre. The fifth panel has two symmetrical white semi-circles and a diamond shape in the middle of the composition. The sixth panel is a sophisticated composition of a red diamond shape in the middle of the composition, on top of the diamond is an inverted red triangle, and beneath the diamond is a red triangle. There is a black frame on both sides, which gives an impression of triangle. The whole panel is composed of triangles. The seventh panel has black triangles against an ochre background; the four triangles face the centre diamond shape in the centre.

5.2.6 *Maguva* (walls around the courtyard) with geometric shapes

The wall painted by Nkuna from the Botludi Village, has four panels, which feature symbolically four geometric shapes, rectangle, tri-angle, diamond, and circle. This wall was painted by a male respondent (figure 31).

The first panel on this *guva* (wall around the courtyard) features two big white half circles with black outlined triangles facing each other from the left and right sides. Inside the big triangles there are two squares making steps. On the top and bottom are two black outlined squares making steps. The second panel has a recurring black half circles with white outlined semi-circle arcs that frame the rectangular wall. Inside the frame, there are two black lined white half-oval shapes. The third panel has a heart painted against a red ochre background. The heart represents a calabash/gourd. The oval shape inside

the heart draws the eye of the viewer to the heart shape. Symbolically, this *guva* (wall around the courtyard) can be interpreted as a heart that is wounded and bleeding. The fourth panel has recurring black half circles with white outlined semi-circle arcs that frame the rectangular wall. Inside the frame, there is a white half circle with a black outlined oval shape.

5.3 Data analysis on case study

The data provided by the respondents were analysed. The data from an individual respondent or groups of respondents were pieced together to get the core explanations and meanings of the data. The existing data contained in the oral traditions and traditional beliefs was crosschecked and linked to the new information obtained from the respondents, i.e. what was portrayed on the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard), *mavala ya nghotsa* (design patterns), *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers), *ku sindza hi makholo* (making patterned floor decorations with cow dung), and *ku tsema* (coloured bands around the hut).

5.3.1 *Maguva* (walls around the courtyard) with mythological animals told in oral tradition and traditional beliefs

The oral traditions and beliefs of the Vatsonga are complex. However, owing to civilisation and modernisation, this intriguing, informed body of knowledge and wisdom is fast disappearing. Therefore, some information provided by the respondents regarding the oral, traditions and beliefs appear senseless until their meaning is revealed.

The African mythological animals are featured on the *maguva* (walls surrounding the yard) as abstract, graphic drawings, and symbolic images. Depending on the geographical settlement of the people under scrutiny, the animals from the creation mythology and beliefs, are portrayed as snakes, lizards, tortoises, hares, hyenas, or dogs.

The Tiébélé, Burkina Faso, and Vatsonga traditional murals that depict oral traditions and traditional beliefs (figure 46a-b and 47), were compared with Mrs Noria Mabasa's courtyard mud made sculptures of dancing figures, two giraffes at the entrance gate, two elephants on the inner wall, a traditional Vhavenda drum, and various high reliefs (figure 37). The wall (figure 46a-b) has one panel divided into three sections. The first section depicts a big snake circling three figures. In front is an image of a

warrior carrying a spear and a triangular shaped wine glass. Behind the warrior is an image of a woman and a younger woman. The section is framed with recurring black triangles pointing towards the picture. Section two depicts three spear carrying warriors approaching a man. Below are two rows of sorghum plants. Black triangles frame the section. Section three has black triangles, black and white square blocks, black and white diamond shapes, stars and chevron shapes.

On this red ochre wall is a high relief of snakes, a graphically drawn snake, and three stylised tortoises, drawn from different views. In the middle is a rectangular shaped lizard with two diagonal lines from left to the right and right to left; a line pointing down suggests a tail. On the left and right are two line drawings of hoes. Recurring triangles and black and white squares frame the wall (figures 47).

The comparison revealed that the Vatsonga do not draw people and animals, nor do they make high reliefs of animals featured in the creation. Instead, they use stylized, simple shapes and lines, colours and textures representing the scales of animals, and a wavy line to imitate a moving animal (figure 24).

The respondents were asked if their surnames had totemic animal meanings from the creation myths. Their response was that as these animals represented bad omens, it is uncommon for the Vatsonga to use these animals for their totem names. When any of these animals appeared in a dream, the person had to consult a spiritual specialist for help, as something bad was going to happen to the person or his/her family members.

When the respondents were asked the importance of their oral traditions and traditional beliefs portrayed on their traditional murals (cf. question 4), they responded that their purpose was to educate the people, and bring a sense of order, respect, and peace amongst the people. One participant added that if someone were to sit on the *guva* (wall around the courtyard), it was believed that his/her mother would lose her breast. This was a way of keeping children from sitting on the *guva* (wall around the courtyard) because it might collapse or damage the paintings.

5.3.2 Interpretations of symbolic meanings of secretive animals and cosmos in the myths

The respondents were asked to explain the meanings in the symbolic shapes of animals, the cosmos, and nature (cf. question 6). They shared their knowledge of stars and the seasons, herbs from nature

and the secret meanings of animals in the African creation mythology depicted on their *minceka* (cloth) (figure 36).

5.3.3 Interpretations of symbolism of oral tradition and traditional beliefs

The Vatsonga and Vhavenda respondents share a traditional belief about a man who used to change himself into a crocodile and attack people. The repeated triangles on the traditional murals represent crocodile's teeth (figures 20, 21 and 33) used as protection from the attacks.

A respondent mentioned another example of a traditional belief. When a child is ill, the jawbone of a certain animal that still has a set of teeth is tied around the neck to protect the child from evil forces (cf. question 10). The type of jawbone depends on the illness.

The scales of a python or chameleon are also represented by recurring triangles in blue, black, and ochre; the repetition of blue, black and ochre arcs or semi-circles outlined in white symbolise the colourful patterns of the reptile (figure 24).

A respondent from Venda mentioned that the black and white bands on the traditional Vhavenda clay pots represent the horizon over the ocean (figure 38-39). The triangles represent the mountains, and the white dots on the triangles are the stars (cf. question 11).

5.3.4 Ancestral shrine with a clay pot adorned with *mavala ya nghotsa* (designs and patterns)

The ancestral shrine is commonly covered with a basic design of triangles, semi circles, and diamond shapes to appease the ancestors. Normally a clay pot adorned with *mavala ya nghotsa* (the design pattern) is used to keep traditional beer as an offering. Depending on the family and the request from the ancestors, a hoe or *Nkany*i (Marula tree) is planted in the shrine (figure 48).

5.4 Data analysis on survey

The data collected from individuals and groups of respondents were analysed. The sampled respondents responded to a standardized questionnaire that was administered for them. Parallel and

crisscrossing data with symbols, signs, and iconography in the form of images, colours, and narratives were scrutinized to obtain the meanings behind this expressive visual language.

5.4.1 *Ku sindza hi makholo* (making patterned floor decorations with cow dung)

The analysed data informed the hypothesis, i.e. that the pictography with iconography, symbols, and signs on the Vatsonga traditional murals is a language that communicates meanings through visual expressive images that make a language. Abstract meanings are expressed in the pictography with iconography, by way of symbols and signs in various shapes, lines, colours, textures, and tones painted and arranged to communicate, in narratives, the cosmic symbols and symbols from nature expressed in the oral traditions and traditions beliefs.

The data analysed and interpreted in this survey exposed that the techniques, styles, subject matter, and the message conveyed by the painted images on the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard) were not acquired through Western education. Mothers and the community passed the oral, tradition and traditional beliefs from generation to generation in general. No Western-style art movements or European painters had any influence. The skill was acquired by a well-organised and complicated means that could express the thoughts, mood, and feelings of the one who practised the elements of visual art.

The *ku sindza hi makholo* (making patterned floor decorations with cow dung) technique was demonstrated by Mamuhale Govela from the Madibeng village (figure 1). Women use this technique to cement and polish the floor of a courtyard. A smooth pebble from a river is used to smooth the floor. Various patterns and designs are drawn with the cow dung mixed with water and earth.

The Balobedu, Vhavenda and Vatsonga from Giyani, Malamulele and Elim call it *makholo* (patterns) *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers). They use the tips of their fingers to draw multiple lines, and their palms to make various shapes and zigzag patterns, with different colours and textures, (figures 3-6).

5.4.2 Landscapes with hidden streets

A floor painting by a respondent from the Muruji village, Mrs Maake, depicts a landscape with hidden streets that is used in the trickery game during the *ndzovolo* (dowry) ceremony (figure 40).

5.4.3 Abstract landscapes of *tintshava* (mountains), *mapapa* (clouds), *misinya* (trees), and *masimu* (fields)

Painted on the floor is a landscapes with *tintshava* (mountains), *mapapa* (clouds), *misinya* (trees), and *masimu* (fields) suggested by long wavy patterns to depict *swipatwana* (small streets). In the centre there are long waves radiating to suggest movement. Short waves illustrate *mapapa* (clouds), and zigzags, short waves and triangles represent *tintshava* (mountains). The *mapapa* (clouds) are depicted as fast moving, i.e. building up a storm (figures 3-6). The *swipatwana* (small streets) runs obliquely across the floor. On the left, the *milambu* (rivers) flow to the street, and on the right, the long lines depict *masimu* (fields) (figures 6).

5.5 Meanings of iconography represented as *tintshava* (mountains), *mapapa* (clouds), *misinya* (trees), and *masimu* (fields)

The data that were analysed and interpreted, revealed that the iconography, symbols and signs of the Vatsonga are found everywhere to depict, e.g. the cosmos, nature, animals, and under water beings. Meanings are attached to everything they use in their everyday life. Simple shapes, graphic drawings, and colours are very important in the interpretation of the oral traditions and traditional beliefs of the people.

5.5.1 *Xikhomo xa phapha* (calabash/gourd handle)

Phapha (calabash/gourd) handles are used during the girls' initiation rituals as phallic objects and to store strong medicine. A gourd/calabash has a hard, dry shell that is also used to store and carry water, medicine, and beer (figure 19).

5.5.2 *Mabilomu/swiluva/ swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers)

Mabilomu/swiluva xa swiphaswana, (calabash/gourd flowers) are simplified one-dimensional paintings of calabash/gourd flowers with stems and a leaf. The flower symbolises the beauty of a fertile woman who can bear children (figure 10-11).

5.5.3 Nceka wa Vatsonga (cloth)

The *Nceka wa Vatsonga* (cloth) is decorated with beads and safety pins to depict the universe with stars in the top section (sky) and fish in the bottom section (sea). The *nceka* (cloth) suggests that the people knew something about the cosmos and life under water (figure 36).

5.5.4 Stars and the moon

The stars and moon are associated with the beauty of a woman, *u saseke ku fana na nyeleti* (she is beautiful like a star), women are named nyeleti. The moon is personified as a woman, e.g. *wansati u le tin'hwetini* (she is menstruating).

5.5.5 Symbolic meaning of red colour

Red and ochre symbolise the blood of Mother Earth. It is uncommon for the Vatsonga to paint their *maguva* (walls around the courtyard) red. They use ochre colour, brown, orange, and yellow instead of red.

5.5.6 Symbolic meaning of white colour painted around the hut

White symbolises cleanliness and purity. It is regarded as the colour of the ancestors and is used by spiritual specialists.

5.5.7 Symbolic meaning of red and white coloured beads

When red and white are used together in the African spiritual arena, it symbolises *swikwembu swa vandzawu*, (ancestor of the Vandzawu people).

5.5.8 Symbolic meaning of red colour band painted around the hut

According to the Vatsonga, a red band painted around the hut communicates a warning to the husband not to visit his wife's hut as she is menstruating.

5.5.9 Symbolic meaning of black colour band painted around the hut

According to the Vatsonga, a black band painted around the hut communicates that that the old man living in the hut is no longer sexually active (figure 25).

5.5.10 Symbolic meaning of white colour band painted around the hut

When the wife paints a white band around her hut, it communicates that the husband can now visit her, i.e. her menstruation cycle is over and she is clean and pure (figure 43).

5.5.11 General symbolic meaning of black colour

According to the Vatsonga, when a family member has died, the person's family will wear black to symbolise that darkness has come to the family.

5.5.12 Symbolic meaning of round shaped hut

A participant explained that the round traditional hut is like a woman's womb and the man sleeping inside is like an embryo. One is protected against evil and natural causes while sleeping in the hut.

5.5.13 Symbolic meaning of *xihlungwana* (wooden pinnacle of the roof)

The *xihlungwana* (wooden pinnacle) on the grass-thatched roof symbolises a male sex organ and the grass roof symbolises pubic hair (cf. figure 22). The *xihlungwana* (wooden pinnacle) is placed on the pinnacle of a grass-thatched roof and is aligned with the *xitiko* (fireplace) on the floor in the centre of the hut. The *Xihlungwana* (wooden pinnacle) represents a man and the *xitiko* (circular fireplace) represents a woman, i.e. they are phallic objects. The idiom, *swihundla swa muti swi tiva hi xihlungwana* (secrets of the family are known by the pinnacle of the hut) (figure 22-23) describes this practice.

5.5.14 Symbolic meaning of *xitiko* (circular fireplace)

The *xitiko* (circular fireplace) is commonly placed in the centre of the hut where cooking takes place. When aligned with a *xihlungwana* (wooden pinnacle) in the centre of a hut, it symbolises intercourse between the male and female (figure 23).

5.6 *Ku tsema* (to paint with coloured bands around the hut)

The data when analysed and interpreted exposed the symbolic meaning of the traditional *ku tsema* (coloured bands around the hut). The walls are painted black, red, yellow, white, green, or blue (figure

42-43). At the bottom of the wall, two or three bands in different colours *ku tsema* (coloured bands around the hut) were painted, depending on the mood of the person working on the mural. The meaning of colours, as explained by the respondents, was imperfectly interpreted as different meanings were attached to the colours. For instance, black and dark blue were explained as dark colours and were associated with darkness, i.e. black is a colour for death or darkness, some people also used dark blue as a colour for bereavement. Red, purple, and yellow are perceived as colours associated with rebirth or the tinge of dawn and sunset. Green and blue depict spring. All the linguistic groups, used bands of different colours on the walls of their homes (cf. question 20). The researcher observed that the Balobedu and the Vhavenda, who settled near or mixed with the Vatsonga, used similar patterns, colours, geometric shapes, symbols, and signs as the Vatsonga on their traditional murals (figures 26-35), (cf. question 14).

5.6.1 *Mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers)

The hut in (figure 3) is divided into an upper, middle and a lower section. The upper section is painted white for cleanliness/purity. The middle section is painted with a black coloured band, which may symbolise that the man of the house is not sexual active anymore. The lower section is painted with red ochre, which may symbolise that the woman of the house is menstruating. The lower section, which is a *stoep* around the hut, is painted with black triangular shapes against the white triangular shapes pointing down. The black tri-angles symbolise the *tintshava* (mountains or crocodile teeth). The upper section depicts the *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (flowers of calabash/gourd) as recurring black arcs (semi-circles) with an ochre horizon band.

5.6.2 Abstract landscapes of *tintshava* (mountains)

The floor (figure 3) painted with cow dung shows a design of a tri angle design with lines creating a pattern that symbolise the *tintshava* (mountains).

5.6.3 Abstract shapes of *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers)

On this wall (figure 28) *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers) are painted as recurring black arcs (semi-circles) with an ochre horizon. Below the wall, a band of *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers) is depicted as white triangles pointing up

and down, with diamond shapes. A heart-shaped flower without a stem also symbolises a *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flower).

5.6.4 Symmetrical composition of *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers)

A symmetrical composition of *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers) in the form of recurring black arcs in the semi-circle shapes with white positive space and two shapes like eyes. (figure 31).

5.6.5 Summary

In this chapter, the data analysed confirmed the hypothesis, i.e. that the pictography with iconography, symbols, signs, shapes and patterns in colourful one-dimensional designs were not merely for decoration but were a symbolic expressive visual language. This African language carried hidden meanings that are understood by certain people in the communities.

The oral traditions and traditional beliefs of the Vatsonga are embedded in their *maguva* (walls around the courtyard), *ku sindza makholo* (making patterned floor decorations with cow dung) and *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers), previously known as wall decorations. These graphically portrayed abstract shapes, symbols, signs, iconography, and patterns were explained and decoded by the elders in the communities. Not all the explanations made sense to the researcher, possibly because some of the participants have forgotten some of the meanings of the symbols, signs, and iconography.

CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to present the findings gathered during the fieldwork as to whether the Vatsonga traditional murals use ancient visual symbols, shapes, colours, lines, and patterns as an expressive language that communicate a message.

While the focus was on the Vatsonga traditional murals, it must be noted that the neighbouring Vatsonga, Balobedu and Vhavenda influenced each other, i.e. they have similar oral traditions, traditional beliefs, iconography, symbols, and signs, which they use in their everyday lives. The differences in their oral traditions and beliefs are minimal.

The Balobedu and Vhavenda were also interviewed concerning the iconography, symbols, signs, oral traditions, beliefs on their traditional murals. The shapes, patterns, symbols and signs used in the oral traditions and traditional beliefs of other linguistic groups in South Africa and other African countries were analysed and interpreted for information that supported the findings. The analysed and interpreted data that had the same information as that of the people under investigation were deliberated on to realise the findings. To validate the analysed and interpreted data, the observation, case study and survey methods were applied.

6.2 Findings on observation

Through the observation method undertaken in the areas mentioned in chapter 4 (cf. 4.2), the following findings were observed regarding the homes, the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard), *Ku sindza hi makholo* (patterned cow dung floor), *ku tsema* (coloured bands around the hut) and *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers) also known as *swiapulana* (small apples).

The analysed and interpreted data revealed that painted patterns on the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard) of the Vatsonga and their neighbours, the Balobedu and Vhavenda, were not merely random symbols, but intricate replications of age-old symbols, which had been depicted on the walls of mud huts over many centuries and carried down by word of mouth.

Many researchers who attempted to analyse and interpret the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard) of the South African linguistic groups, concluded that the traditional murals were meaningless and served only as decorations and that the decorated patterns, shapes and motifs were of their utensils and traditional dresses (cf. 2.3). Previous scholars were not told the truth about the secret language embedded in the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard). The murals existed long before the so-called traditional dresses made from cotton, linen, and silk. The traditional clothes of the Vatsonga were made from animal skins. It can be argued that the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard) with *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (of calabash/gourd flowers) and utensils such as the calabash/gourds with the *mavaya ya nghotsa* (designs and patterns) painted on them, influenced the *makholo* (patterns), shapes, and colours on the traditional dresses.

6.2.1 Findings on the homes

Data was analysed and interpreted during the researcher's interaction with the respondents to source the findings. It was found that the homes of the Vatsonga had changed drastically over the past 40 years; the drastic change started around 1994 when South Africa became a democratic country and black South Africans began benefitting economically. The round mud huts have increasingly been replaced by Western style houses until only a few are left.

The homes (huts) that survived the transformation are in bad shape, as they are not taken care of anymore. Thus, only a few huts still exist with visual signs, symbols and iconography (in the form of lines, shapes, and forms), and these are not as expressive as those painted 40 years ago. Very little spiritual and magical imagery was observed on the huts and *maguva* (walls around the courtyard) of the Vatsonga. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the symbolical representations on the homes did not carry meanings; the little information acquired revealed that meanings were attached to the shapes, colours, and patterns, e.g. those drawn on the courtyard floor, that were communicated through expressive visual images that comprise a visual language.

The new huts were built according to Western designs; they were not built according to the African traditional way of building a hut. Western materials, such as cement bricks and corrugated roofs, were used to build the round huts (figure 32) and the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard), thus replacing

the old mud huts. Therefore, the *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers), *ku tsema* (coloured bands around the hut) *ni ku sindza hi vulongo* (making patterned floor decorations with cow dung) and the pictography with symbols, shapes, colours, patterns and their meanings is becoming obsolete.

6.2.2 Findings on the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard)

It was found that the essence of making *maguva* (walls around the courtyard) has died out and only a little information about them remains. The surviving *maguva* (walls around the courtyard) have a new structure and even the practitioners and custodians of African wisdom and knowledge have forgotten much of the symbolic language they contained 40 years ago. Because of modernization and westernization, a new pictography with iconography of new symbols, signs, patterns and colours, is transforming the traditional language into another language of modern pictography.

However, the meanings provided by the respondents from the analysed interpretations of data about the anthropomorphic shapes, geometric shapes, and colours used on the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard) are different from those of previous scholars. The shapes, lines, and pictographs have symbolic representations that needed careful analysis and interpretation to understand what they represent symbolically (cf. 5.2.2).

Many scholars ignored the symbolism of pictography embedded in what they understood to be simply geometric shapes. Some Vatsonga anthropomorphic drawings of plants with long stems and a single heart shaped leaf at the end of the stem symbolise a woman, and the plant with two heart shaped leaves on two branches resemble a womb and fallopian tubes. The leaves at the end of the stem symbolise the ovaries or seeds (figure 15). The stylised and simplified painting of a common one-dimensional calabash/gourd flower represents a beautiful young girl who matures into a woman.

The findings revealed that some of the respondents did not know the meanings of the shapes, symbols, and signs on the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard). Some gave mixed responses to the purpose of painting the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard) and *ku tsema hi mabandi* (coloured bands around the hut), and some believed that the paintings on the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard) are for decoration. These respondents informed the hypothesis and the research questions. They told the

researcher that the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard) communicated messages only to the initiated and the community, e.g. recurring triangle shapes represented a mountain and recurring semi-circles in the form of arcs, represented *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers).

6.2.3 Findings on the *ku sindza hi makholo* (patterned cow dung floor)

The data analysed and interpreted in chapter 4 found that the *ku sindza hi makholo vulongo* (making patterned floor decorations with cow dung) in the courtyards and inside the huts also had symbolic meanings. The Vatsonga women do not use any *vulongo* (dung) when making the *ku sindza hi makholo* (making patterned floor decorations with cow dung), only *vulongo bya tihomu* (cow dung) because the *homu* (cow) is associated with a woman as a caregiver as it provides milk for the calf and the people.

It was found that the *ku sindza hi makholo vulongo* (making patterned floor decorations with cow dung) was a one-dimensional landscape seen from the air and drawn on the floor subconsciously. The different shapes, lines, textures, and tones depended on the mood of the artist, i.e. they could be dramatic or calm. The *ku sindza hi vulongo* (patterned cow dung floor) had a spiritual connection and symbolically, people could work on the spiritual landscape. Some respondents could translate and interpret the abstract landscapes on the floor whilst others just mentioned how the *vulongo bya tihomu* (cow dung) was useful to them.

Cattle are important to the Vatsonga. A bull is associated with the head of the family, and it connects people to their ancestors. *Vulongo bya tihomu* (cow dung) was used as an antiseptic on wounds. Inhaling the smoke from burning *vulongo bya tihomu* (cow dung) is a cure to asthma, and cow urine was used to treat eye infections.

6.2.4 Findings on the *ku tsema* (coloured bands around the hut)

The three linguistic groups have different meanings for the *ku tsema hi mabandi* (coloured bands around the hut) but they have similar symbolic interpretations of the colours and shapes. Their information led to the realization that the *ku tsema* (coloured bands around the huts) were not merely decorations, they were a way of communication between a husband, his wives, and the community.

It was observed that the *ku tsema* (coloured bands around the hut) were painted on the round traditional huts and the new six-sided huts. The *mabilomu/siluva/swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers) on the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard) on the cement brick walls are painted with oil paint and not colours from the earth anymore (figure 32). It was also observed that unlike the Vhavenda and the Balobedu, the Vatsonga painted with many bands of colours for which they gave meanings. The other two linguistic groups would use one or two colours only, usually black or brown paint.

6.3 Findings from the case study method

The case study method revealed that the creation myth is common amongst Africans in Africa. Special attention regarding the symbolic representation is given to the animals featured in the mythology. Animal behaviour, movements, colours, and the scales on their bodies are significant to the creation myth. Animals are also used to heal illnesses and in the practice of magic.

A comparison between the decorated mud houses of the Tiébélé, Burkina Faso, Hausa, and Dogon of Mali and the Vatsonga *maguva* (walls around the courtyard), *Ku sindza hi makholo vulongo* (patterned cow dung floor) and *ku tsema* (coloured bands around the hut) found that the creation myth was presented differently. The decorated mud houses of the Tiébélé and Burkina Faso depict a realistic one-dimensional drawing of snakes, tortoises, lizards, hoes, and plants (figure 47) and the adjoining wall also shows one-dimension line drawings of a snake, soldiers, and sorghum plants, and repetitive shapes in black and white triangles (figure 46a-b).

The *maguva* (walls around the courtyard) painted by the Vatsonga, depict stylised shapes of reptiles featured in the creation myth by arranging the shapes and colours to imitate the skin of the reptile (figure 24). Noria Mabasa from Venda made mud sculptures and reliefs depicting animals, people and the famous Vhavenda drum. The Vhavenda also respect pythons and crocodiles, as they have symbolic meanings. Their scales are symbolised by triangular shapes (figure 20-21). The traditional murals of the Basotho living in the Free State are called *litema* (wall paintings). The style and technics used in the *litema* (wall painting) is different from those of the Vatsonga. The Basotho cover their houses with patterns made out of symbols. At the entrance, they draw an animal that symbolises the totem. They do not build round huts with grass roofs anymore; they build houses with square rooms and corrugated iron roofs.

The custodians of African knowledge and wisdom are dying without passing on their knowledge of the traditions and beliefs. The original meanings of the iconography commonly used, were changed, lost, forgotten, or misinterpreted. Hence, depictions observed that relate to the oral narratives associated with traditions, beliefs, and myths were identified and explained by only a few respondents. This showed that the targeted people only understood what the paintings on the walls meant when the meanings were analysed and interpreted.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that the depictions, which had specific traditional meanings associated with the human life cycle and taboos, i.e. birth, puberty, marriage, childbearing, and death, to the Vatsonga lost their meanings and purpose. The contributing factor to this argument is that people do not respect oral narratives, traditions and beliefs as their guidelines in life. Initiation schools for boys and girls, where they were taught by word of mouth, iconography, traditions, and beliefs, have almost disappeared.

The finding on the conceptualization factor is that the subject matter was decided subconsciously. The life experience and emotions that a woman was going through overflowed as she painted consciously. Since there was no formal education (in the Western understanding) for this kind of visual expression, planning and compositional sketches were done as she was taught by her mother or the community. This could be why almost all the homes were painted with similar colours, iconography, symbols, and signs using the same techniques.

6.4 Findings from the survey

The survey method was used to analyse and interpret the data that was provided by the respondents who were questioned individually or in groups, e.g. the respondents answers to what the *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers), and iconography images from cosmic and nature meant. The data analysed found that the pictography, painted by women, could be viewed as a language that is communicated to the viewer either consciously or sub-consciously.

The crux of this survey method yielded the findings entrenched in the responses from individuals and groups of respondents. The findings must be understood, analysed, and interpreted in the context of African knowledge and wisdom and not in the Western way of interpretation.

6.4.1 Colours communicated secret messages and meanings

The messages communicated using iconography, symbols, and signs differ in their expressions. Some symbols and signs are used to communicate short messages, and some are used to convey long messages. Colours communicated secret messages and meanings to those who understand the expressive language.

6.4.2 Vatsonga's knowledge of celestial influence on the elements

Knowledge of celestial influence on the elements is expressed with drawings of a star, i.e. three or four lines are drawn crisscrossing diagonally. A similar depiction of stars is evident in the mural of the Tiébélé, Burkina Faso. This concept of celestial stars is also depicted on the Vatsonga *minceka* (cloth) using safety pins.

6.4.3 African knowledge and wisdom associated with nature and totemic animals

African knowledge and wisdom involves nature and animals, e.g. intelligent, strong, dangerous animals are chosen to be tribal totem names and are represented with symbols and signs.

6.4.4 *Mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (flowers of calabash/gourd) and *mavala ya nghotsa* (designs and patterns)

The symbols known as *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers) on the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard) or the *mavala ya nghotsa* (designs and patterns) on the utensils, mistakenly called geometric shapes by previous researchers, can be traced back to African linguistic groups in other countries. The ancient Egyptians used it as hieroglyphs on their temples, the Dogon People from Mali, the Tiébélé, in Burkina Faso, and the Red Indians in North America use it on their *wampum* cloth to tell their oral traditions.

The Vatsonga could have been influenced by the symbols and signs brought to Limpopo Province possibly by the Vhavenda and Balobedu. The Vatsonga are also known for their tattoos and scarification of the same symbols and signs used by the Vhavenda and Balobedu. Other Africans, as

part of their initiation rites, also used the same tattoos and scarification. Some were kept secret and some were to show that the person had been initiated.

6.5 Summary

The analysed and interpreted data provided the findings that answered the research questions. It was found that pictography with symbols and signs carried meanings that were communicative. This is an expressive visual of images, colours, patterns, lines, and tones. When all these are arranged together, they can be read consciously or unconsciously and understood by the community or the initiated ones.

CHAPTER 7: GENERAL CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the general conclusion and recommends improvements that can be made on the research and findings. It was assumed in the hypothesis that the pictography with iconography, symbols, and signs painted on the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard) of the traditional huts of the Vatsonga is an expressive visual language that communicated meanings. The reasons for the failures were explained in the three studies done in this research, i.e. the literature review, case study and survey (cf. 7.2.1 to 7.2.3).

7.2 General conclusion

It was concluded that a gap exists in the understanding of how Africans communicated and expressed themselves through the pictographs, symbols, and signs that formed a language. Many scholars argue whether Africans knew how to write or read, and many questions were asked as to whether they documented their history, knowledge, and traditions. However, these researchers failed to find out why the Africans depicted certain shapes, symbols, images, and signs in the way they did and why they made sculptural reliefs from mud and clay on the walls of their homes.

7.2.1 Meanings and interpretations of pictography with iconography, symbols, signs, colours and patterns

Researchers were unable to collect data on the correct meanings and interpretations of the iconography, symbols, signs, colours, patterns, and shapes used by the Vatsonga on their *maguva* (walls around the courtyard), *ku sindza hi vulongo bya tihomu* making patterned floor decorations with cow dung) and *ku tsema* (coloured bands around the hut) because they undermined the knowledge, wisdom, oral narratives, traditions, and beliefs of the Africans, and were not given certain information as they did not belong to the circle of the initiated.

This answered the first aim of the study, i.e. to ascertain and record how the symbols in the African traditional murals were used to capture its intrinsic meaning as an ancient pictorial language.

The literature reviewed on this topic did not attempt to interpret and translate the meanings in the iconography, symbols, signs, patterns, colours, and shapes on the traditional murals. However, the findings from the related research were that the traditional dresses, and patterns and shapes on the utensils influenced the traditional murals of the Bapedi people in Sekhukhune. Thus, these findings raise the question: What was the origin of the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard), *ku sindza hi vulongo bya tihomu* (patterned cow dung) and *ku tsema hi mihlovo* (coloured bands) and the so-called African traditional dresses made of linen and cotton?

The only information that is close to this study's findings and interpretations is Nettleton's (1984a) examination of the sculptures, art, and crafts of the Vatsonga and the Vhavenda in Limpopo Province. However, the deep symbolic meaning of the objects, utensils, beads, and colours was kept secret from the uninitiated, e.g. the *milawu/tingoma* (secrets).

7.2.2 Pictography with iconography of symbols, signs, patterns and colours were not used only for decorative purpose but also for communication

The second objective of the study, i.e. to establish that the traditional wall decorations used to decorate traditional dwellings are not merely decorative but are a language that informs through symbols, which have a meaning embedded in the local/cultural wall decorations used to adorn traditional homes. Data was collected through observation and the qualitative method, case study, and survey. The results were analysed and interpreted to get the findings. The findings on the iconography, symbols, signs, patterns, colours, and shapes that were regarded as merely decorative are revealed in their interpretations and meanings, i.e. their activities in relation to three categories of what is generally known as *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers) (c.f. below), *maguva* (walls around the courtyard), *ku sindza hi vulongo bya tihomu vulongo* (making patterned floor decorations with cow dung) and *ku tsema* (coloured bands around the hut).

7.2.3 Common pictography, symbols, signs, shapes, patterns and colours

The meaning of certain pictography, shapes, symbols, signs, patterns and colours are common to Africans. The third objective was to find out why Africans use similar pictography, i.e. to link the origins of the various African cultural representations of similar symbols, showing the connectivity of the linguistic symbols used in this ancient language to the three mentioned societies in Limpopo Province and other African linguistic groups. These are revealed by the meanings and interpretations in their educational information in relation to the narratives (cf. below) as expressed by the depiction of symbols and signs representing *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers), oral history, traditions and beliefs.

Previous researchers and scholars overlooked the importance of what was known as wall decorations on the homes of Africans, specifically the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard), *ku sindza hi vulongo* (making patterned floor decorations with cow dung) and *ku tsema hi mabandi ya mihlovo* (coloured bands around the hut) of the Vatsonga.

7.3 Outcomes of the survey

The results from observations, the case study, and the survey are linked. The following is a summary of the survey results:

- Previous scholars and researchers overlooked the importance of the ancient African way of writing, i.e. using visual expressive language. Two pitfalls faced by previous scholars and the younger African generation are that
 - they simply pushed a negative agenda by saying that Africans could not read or write
 - the scholars and researchers could not read the intricate and intelligently written messages on the walls of African homes
 - they were biased when reporting their findings, saying that the pictography, iconography, symbols, and signs were meaningless.
 - the findings by previous scholars caused the younger African generation to be negative about their African knowledge and wisdom regarding the oral narratives, traditions, and beliefs told through symbols, shapes, colours and signs.

7.4 Recommendations

To understand what was previously called "Vatsonga traditional wall decorations", one must firstly know that according to the Vatsonga, this phenomenon is divided into three categories called *maguva* (walls around the courtyard), *ku tsema* (coloured bands around the hut) and *ku sindza hi vulongo bya tihomu* (making patterned floor decorations with cow dung). All three groups make up what is known as the *mabilomu ya swiphaswana/swiphaswana* (flowers of calabash/gourd), which may appear to be decorative patterns to an outsider. The *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers) symbolise women's fertility (cf. table 7.1).

7.4.1 The four basic categories that comprise the visual expressive language of *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers) on the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard)

Categories	Description
1. <i>Maguva</i>	To explore the <i>maguva</i> with depictions and expressions through colours, patterns, symbols and signs. The status and feminine side of women in the community.
2. <i>Ku tsema</i>	Engages the historical and self-expressions through the symbolic meanings of coloured bands painted around the huts.
3. <i>Ku sindza hi makholo</i>	Evaluates, analyses, and interprets the importance of the indigenous knowledge and wisdom on the pictography with iconography, patterns, shapes, signs and symbols used by women to communicate. Depending on the mood of the artist, it is done on the courtyard floor, and sometimes on the walls and inside the hut.
4. Pictography	Develop an explanatory theory that can promote best practice on the pictography of the Vatsonga's visual expressive language.

7.4.2 Status of women in the community and their depiction through symbols and signs

The categories that comprise the visual expressive language of the *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana* (calabash/gourd flowers) of the Vatsonga and the meanings of their symbols and signs are often misunderstood. When exploring the status of women in the community and their depiction through signs and symbols, the scholars and researchers of African knowledge, wisdom and expressive languages should understand:

- the status of African women in the community. Women occupy important ranks in the family and the community. They are initiated and marked with secret symbols to be identified with those in their circle. Certain symbols are understood only by women and some are used to represent women.
- the importance of women as custodians of African knowledge and wisdom. The women are the keepers of traditions and knowledge. Some women are initiated as *sangomas* (traditional healers) who are keepers of traditional knowledge.

7.4.3 Depictions on the walls

To understand the early history of the Africans that is documented orally through storytelling; beliefs; traditions; the paintings on the walls of their homes, utensils, and animal skins; and in the form of tattoos, attention should be focused on the information given by the respondents with knowledge of African beliefs and traditions. This subsection represents Rule 2, identified in Table 7.1, historical self-expression through the symbolic meanings of coloured bands painted around the huts:

- Step 1: Not to undermine those who are old and uneducated in terms of Western education. Data on ancient knowledge and wisdom is encoded everywhere but only the elders know how to explain, read, interpret, and narrate the meanings. The case study explains the oral traditions of the Vhavenda and Vatsonga regarding the meanings of the coloured bands painted on the huts (5.3.2).
- Step 2: Self-expressions through the symbolic meanings of colour. Africa is a colourful continent and Africans communicated and expressed their feelings through colours, and named and attached symbolic meanings to colours, i.e. colours represent the dead, the living, spirituality, emotions, the universe, and nature.

7.4.4 Evaluation, analysis and interpretation of the importance of indigenous knowledge and wisdom

To have insight into African indigenous knowledge and wisdom, one must start with the custodians. To be able to learn and understand the knowledge and wisdom of Africans, one must first be accepted into the secret circle to become one of them and then one must be initiated into their customs and taboos. One is then able to evaluate, analyse and interpret their symbols and meanings. This subsection represents category 3, identified in Table 7.1 of the evaluation, analyses, and interpretation of the indigenous knowledge and wisdom. The following steps should be taken:

- Step 1: The importance of the indigenous knowledge and wisdom. Observation, case study, and survey methods should be applied to source the indigenous knowledge and wisdom because this is not yet available in written form for research purposes. Researchers still rely on the information that is told and narrated orally by the custodians. Thus, the lives and behaviour of Africans is tied to their indigenous knowledge and wisdom learned from the communities. This teaches them their origin and gives them identity (cf. 2.6).
- Step 2: The importance of oral tradition. Oral tradition serves a purpose in the African communities. In the Vatsonga communities, the elders in the family tell stories and oral history. This is to educate their children about their heritage, culture, tribes, and names and clan names. They also teach their people about important events in their calendars, totems, cosmic and natural behaviours.

7.4.5 Explanatory theory of iconography in the Vatsonga visual expressive language

An explanatory theory must be developed that can promote best practice on the pictography, iconography, symbols and signs of the Vatsonga's visual expressive language. Every linguistic group had a spoken language and a secret language composed of symbols and signs. The Vatsonga language developed over centuries while they were migrating, inter-marrying, and sharing influences with other people. This visual expressive language formed of iconography, symbols, and signs can be directed to specific groups and individuals. Hence, this subsection represents category 4, identified in Table 7.1 above. This rule helps to develop the explanatory theory that can promote best practice on the iconography, symbols and signs of the Vatsonga's visual expressive language.

The following two steps should be taken in this exploration:

- Step 1: The ancient African symbols and signs known as the Ankara writings. The Hawusa, Dogons in Mali, and other Africans use visual symbols known as "*andinkra*" that were originally created by the Akan people of Ghana. Today these are found and used by the Yoruba in West Nigeria as status symbols.
- Step 2: The Vatsonga symbols and signs known as the *maguva* (walls around the courtyard) *mabilomu/swiluva/swiphaswana*, *ku tsema* (coloured bands around the hut), and *ku sindza hi makholo vulongo* (patterned cow dung floor).

The analysed and interpreted findings exposed that the Vatsonga also have a language that is made of symbols and signs. As in other linguistic groups in Africa, the Vatsonga use the symbols, signs and narratives instruction, to show their marital or chieftain status, and ranks in the family and community at large. As these practices are being negated and ignored in this contemporary era, they are fast becoming obsolete.

The information in this research has therefore unlocked the way for further research. It is recommended that:

- scholars research and document indigenous African knowledge and wisdom before it disappears forever
- scholars focus on African oral traditions and traditional beliefs and examine how Africans this language originated
- universities, such as the Department of African Languages and the Department of Arts and Culture, should partner with researchers and schools and fund this research area
- the works of Prof. Nettleton on the Vatsonga and Vhavenda community art be studied
- the new generation be encouraged to have an interest in their heritage in order to guard and preserve it.

7.5 Summary

It must be noted that the limitation of this study is that only older women and grandmothers, who are the custodians of African knowledge and wisdom, were interviewed. To make the findings of this research more valid, further study of other communities is needed to cover the whole spectrum of knowledgeable communities in South Africa. Further studies can also include custodians of African knowledge and wisdom in other African countries. Throughout the African countries various migration routes indicates that pictorial symbolism, especially in the development of the visual expressive language of signs and symbols, is largely universal and that many symbols appear to be similar. Furthermore, it must be realised that African wall decorations are not merely random symbols, but are rather an intricate replication of age-old symbols that had been orated and carried down through generations over many centuries, being firmly embedded in the traditional cultural practice.

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9. Appendix



Figure 1

Madibeng Village: *Ku sindza hi vulongo*
(Name: Mamuhale Govela)



Figure 2

Mariveni Village: *Xiphaswana*
(Name: Maria Mkhari)



Figure 3

N'wajaheni Village: *Makholo ya tintshava*
(Name: Mthavini Baloyi)



Figure 4

Botludi Village: *Mapatu*
(Name: Mamulatela Nese Letswalo)



Figure 5

Madibeng Village: *Makholo ya tintshava na Mapapa*
(Name: Mamuhale Govela)



Figure 6

Botludi Village: *Tintshava na Milambu*
(Name: Mamulatela Nese Letswalo)



Figure 7 (a)

Mbhokota Village: *Swiapulana*
(Name: Unknown)



Figure 7 (b)

Mbhokota Village: *Tintshava*
(Name: Unknown)



Figure 8

Mbhokota Village: *Mrab'arab'a na Mabilomu*
(Name: Kokwana Makaringe)



Figure 9

Mbhokota Village: *Mrab'arab'a*
(Name: Kokwana Makaringe)

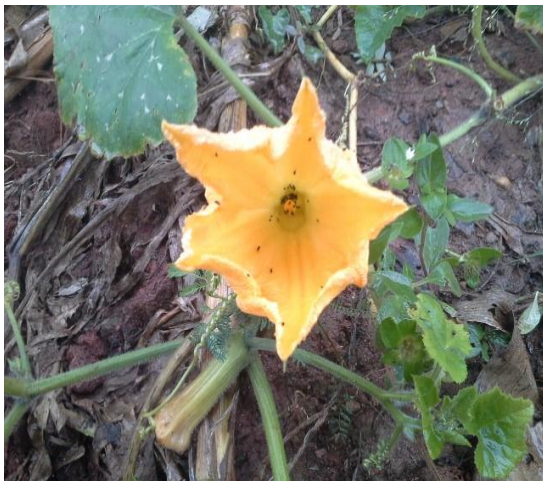


Figure 10

Xiluva xa Xiphaswa (Flower of calabash/gourd)



Figure 11

Mavambe Village: *Xiluva xa Xiphaswa*
(Flower of calabash/gourd)
(Name: Mamaila Hobyana)



Figure 12

Babanana Village: *Phaphatana* (Butterfly)
(Name: Maria Mhlongo)



Figure 13

Hanyani-Thomo Village: *Phaphatana* (Butterfly)
(Name: Dedeya Ngoveni)



Figure 14

Njelele Village: *Swiphaswana* (gourds)
(Calabash/gourd flowers)
(Name: Mbulayeni)



Figure 15

Hanyani-Thomo Village: *Swiapulana/Swiphaswana*
(Small apples calabash/gourds)
(Name: Dedeya Ngoveni)



Figure 16

Nhunguvana (gourd in a shape of a woman)
(Courtesy of Prof Anita Nettleton)



Figure 17

Mbvule (doll)
(Courtesy of Prof Anita Nettleton)

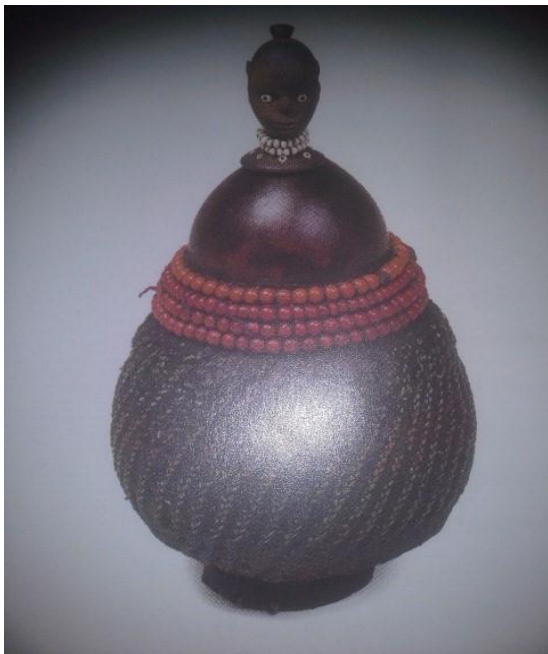


Figure 18

Nhunguvana (calabash/gourd)
(Courtesy of Prof Anita Nettleton)

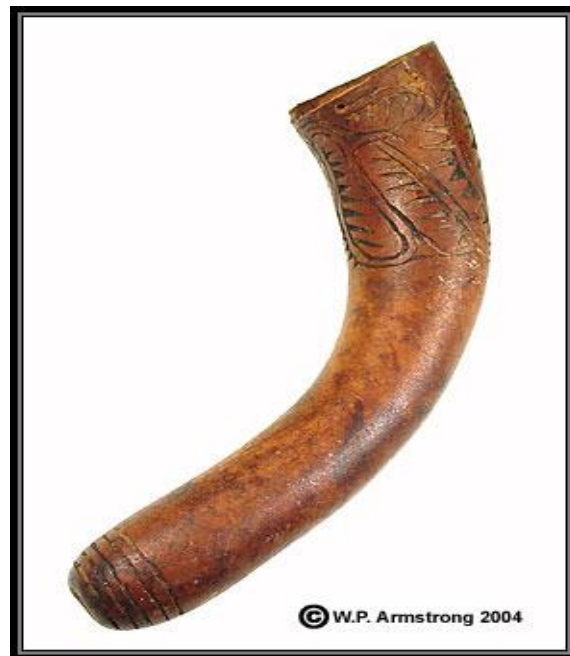


Figure 19

Xikhomo xa Ndzheko (calabash/gourd handle)
(Courtesy of Goole.com)



Figure 20

Vuwani Village: *Meno ya ngwenya* (Crocodile teeth) Vhavenda Sculpture: Crocodile eating man.
Tintshava (Mountains)
(Name: Selina Ravele)



Figure 21

(Courtesy of Google.com)



Figure 22

N'wajaheni Village: *Xihlungwana* (Pinnacle)
(Name: Unknown)



Figure 2

Khubvi Village: *Xitiko* (circular fireplace)
(Name: Naledzani Ester Tshikudo)



Figure 24

Mavele Village: *Tintshava na Swiphaswa*

(Name: Unknown)



Figure 25

Mavele Village: *Ku tsema* (Black band, on the white wall)

(Name: James Baloyi's home)



Figure 26

Maswanganyi Village: *Makanja* (Tattoo)

(Name: Unknown)

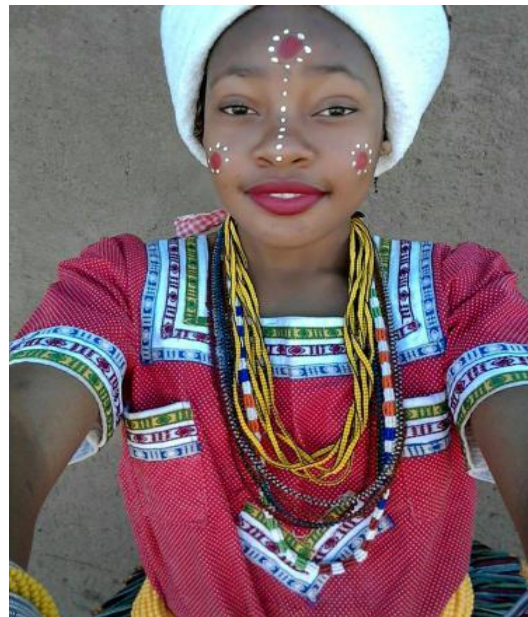


Figure 27

Vatsonga Facial decorations

(Name: Courtesy of Google.com)



Figure 28

Muruji Village: *Swiphaswana/swiluva*
(Calabash/gourd flowers)
(Name: Maake)



Figure 29

N'wajaheni Village: *Ku tsema*
(To paint with coloured band around the hut).
(Name: James Baloyi's home)



Figure 30

Botludi Village: *Maguva*
(Painted walls around the courtyard)
(Name: Mamulatela Letswalo)



Figure 31

Botludi Village: *Maguva*
(Painted walls around the courtyard)
(Name: Mr Nkuna)



Figure 32

Vuwani Village: *Maguva*
(Name: Tshavhungwe Netsinyele)



Figure 33

Hanyani-Thomo Village: *Tintshava* (Mountains)
(Name: Nyanisi Chavalala)



Figure 34

Hanyani-Thomo Village: *Swiphaswana* (Gourds)
(Name: Khanyisa Mathevula)



Figure 35

Mavambe Village: *Xiluva xa Xiphaswa*
(Flower of a gourd)
(Name: Mamaila Hobbyana)

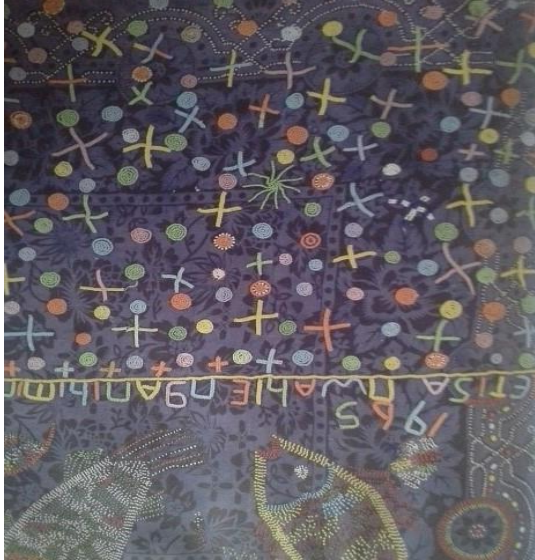


Figure 36

Nceka wa Mutsonga

(Courtesy of Prof. Anita Nettleton)



Figure 37

Maguva (Vhavenda courtyard)

(Courtesy of Noria Mabasa)



Figure 38

Vhavenda clay pot

(Courtesy of google)



Figure 39

Vhavenda clay pot

(Courtesy of google)



Figure 40

Muruji Village: *Swipatwana* (streets)
(Name: Mrs Maake)



Figure 41

Khubvi Village: *Tintshava, Mapapa, Milambu*
(Landscape of Mountains, Clouds, and Rivers.
(Name: Naledzani Ester Tshikudo)



Figure 42

Nwajaheni Village: *Meno ya ngwenya*
(crocodile teeth)



Figure 43

Nwajaheni Village: *Ku tsema* (Painted with
symbolic colours)

(Name: Mthavini Baloyi)



Figure 44

Mavambe Village: Vatsonga pot with
mavala ya nghotsa (symbolic pattern and designs)
(Name: unknown)

(Name: Mthavini Rikhotso)



Figure 45

Botludi Village; *Maguva*
(Walls around the courtyard)
(Name: Mamulatela Letswalo)



Figure 46 (a)

Mural of the Tiébélé, Burkina Faso
(Courtesy of Google.com)



Figure 46 (b)

(Courtesy of Google.com)



Figure 47
Guva with mythical animals
 (Courtesy of Google.com)



Figure 48 (a)
 Vuwani Village: *Gandzelo* (ancestral shrine)
 (Name: Selina Ravele)

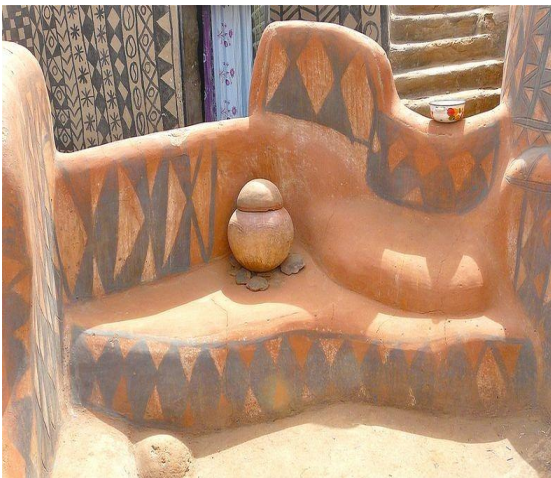


Figure 48 (b)
 Ancestral shrine with *meno/tintshava*
 (Crocodile teeth and mountains with
 depicted by repeated triangle shapes)
 (Courtesy of Google.com)



Figure 49
 Xikukwana Village: *Ximila xa xiphaswana*
 (Stem with leaves of calabash/gourd)
 (Maria Baloyi)